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# MISREAD PASSAGES

OF

## SCRIPTURE.

*SECOND SERIES.*

BY

**J. BALDWIN BROWN, B.A.,**

*Author of "The Divine Life in Man," "The Home Life," &c., &c.*



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## PREFACE.

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THE kind reception which was accorded to a former series of papers on Misread Passages of Scripture has led me to prepare a new series for the press. At no period probably was the interest manifested in the true interpretation of Scripture greater than it is at present. As the Bible becomes the subject of free and intelligent criticism, and men bring to bear upon it the same discrimination which they use in their judgment of other books, they find out for themselves how unlike it is to all other books, and how fully it is charged with a wisdom which is from a deeper than a human spring. We have been tempted to adopt, in our solicitude for the safety of the Bible, the policy of the pagan Olympus. We have flung around the object of our care a sheltering mist, which, while no doubt it has baffled many an assailant, has robbed it of its power of self defence—that self manifestation wherein lies the victorious strength of everything that is of God. When shall we learn that the Bible has more to fear from the policy of short-sighted defenders than from the assaults of searching critics, and leave it free to speak its own word and do its own work in the world?

The last few years have wrought a great emancipation for the Bible; and the kind of interest which is



now taken in its truths and its teachings is healthy and full of promise. Many of the difficulties with which it is supposed to be cumbered disappear the moment that an open eye is brought to bear upon them, and the reader is willing to interpret the parts in the spirit and by the light of the whole. To help young students, as far as lies in my power, to bring the open eye to bear on the sacred records, is the main purpose of this little book. It differs from the former in one important respect. It is less a criticism of particular texts which appear to be popularly misinterpreted, than a consideration of scriptural subjects on which much misunderstanding exists, owing mainly to the supposed teaching of various passages of the word of God. I have discussed a few of these in a free, simple, and I hope suggestive manner. I have not aimed in any case at an exhaustive argument. My object has been, as before, to stimulate and guide thought on biblical questions, rather than to formulate conclusions. If I can lead any thoughtful young students to read the Bible for themselves, with a desire to discover what the whole word teaches, rather than to rest on an isolated text, as though the whole mind of the Spirit on that point were there expressed, my object will have been gained.

J. BALDWIN BROWN.

CLAPHAM, *September*, 1870.

# Misread Passages of Scripture.

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## I.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIAN UNITY.

“ There shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”—JOHN x. 16.

LITERALLY, “ *there shall be one flock, one shepherd.*” The difference between the two renderings is a grave one. The mistranslation of the words of the Saviour in the English version is most unfortunate, as I believe that it has been at the root of much serious misapprehension of the true nature of that unity of the church which was contemplated by the Lord. “ One flock, with one Shepherd,” is distinctly the prevision of Christ. The word rightly rendered “ fold ” in the earlier portion of the verse is in this last clause advisedly changed, to the word which can only be translated “ flock.” Not one “ fold ;” many folds it might be, many visible bodies, many diverse forms of thought and energy ; but one flock—one spirit, one heart to hear and to obey the Master, one hope, one home in the “ general assembly and church of the firstborn ” on high.

We mourn over the divisions of Christendom, and

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most justly. The saddest, darkest thing under the sun, in the estimation of heaven, must be the rent, disfigured, distorted body of that church for which the Saviour prayed, as He entered into the shadow of the last agony, that it might be one as He and the Father were one, that the world might believe that He came forth from God. But it is discord that heaven mourns over, not diversity. Two hearts, hearts at war, hearts in schism—not two thoughts, two diverse because each of them necessarily partial modes of apprehending and setting forth the deep things of God. When Christendom agrees to one creed, one form of words, it will sign its own sentence of dissolution. When it agrees to one spirit, is of one heart to hear the voice of the one Shepherd, and to recognise by the heart's sure instincts all who in various forms and by various paths are striving to obey and to follow Him, it will have a fresh Pentecostal baptism, a fresh outburst of joyous victorious life. For Christendom to agree to the same words, and to rest in the same intellectual conceptions as setting forth the whole truth of God, would be simply to rest on a human foundation and not on a Divine. God has not given us a creed in the Bible. He could not have given us a creed. No words which even Divine art could combine could express to the understanding of man the whole sum of the truth of God. He has given us a life, and such light as flows from it; and "*the life is the light of men.*" To walk in the Light, to be drawn by the magnet of the Life, this is the life of faith.

And here we discover the basis of the true unity; a common openness of heart to the living constraints of the Lord Jesus; a common love, and an instinct to recognise that love in the disciples, as the bond of the common brotherhood. One flock in the great wide world, with its vast far-stretching mountain pastures, where by ten thousand paths the sheep are roaming, but all familiar with the one Voice, all ready to follow where the Shepherd leads them, and all trusting to His care and skill to bring them at length "into the place which He has prepared." "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions:*"—various folds even there, and free play of the individual life—"if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also" (John xiv. 1-3).

These words of my text have a very peculiar and beautiful significance in the place in which they occur. The Lord's ministry on earth was ending. All that He had earned by His life of self-sacrificing devotion to man was the cross and the grave. The shadow of death was already darkening round Him. His heart was feeling in the gloom for all that the Father would give Him as the fruit of His pain, the purchase of His blood. Large visions floated before His sight as He drew near the hour of His anguish, the hour of the prince of darkness, of the kingdom which He would

win by death, of the "general assembly and church of the firstborn" whom He would conduct redeemed to His Father's home on high. "*Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring.*" As the darkness deepened the glorious fruit of the victory which He was winning loomed larger and larger on His sight. "*And I, if I be lifted up,*" He cried, with a prevision of the future of redemption whose range none of us yet can measure, "*will draw all men unto me.*" He saw in that hour, from the height from which He gazed, the whole human world wandering like sheep lost on the mountains, straying, aimless, joyless, hopeless, along a path which could end only in the abyss. He felt in Himself the power to recall, reclaim, and save them. His own they were. By Him God made the worlds. In His image man was fashioned. Everywhere, in every heart, there was something which belonged to Him, which He had implanted, which He had embreathed, which owned the tones of His voice, the touch of His hand, the magnetism of His mighty, all-suffering, all-sacrificing love. And He knew that the tear-stained, blood-stained path to Calvary was the way by which He would find them, straying, perishing, in the wilderness, and bring them in, the sheep to the everlasting fold, the sons to the everlasting home; and He uttered the mighty joy of His heart even in the hour when the darkness of death was closing round Him, in the awful triumphant words—"These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father,

*the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many, as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."* "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John xvii. 1-5, 24-26.)

We shall consider—

I. The relation of the gentile world to the Jew, and to the kingdom of the Lord: "OTHER SHEEP I HAVE."

II. The fold and the flock: the relation of the two terms, and the reason of their distinction.

III. The Lord's aspiration for the future of His church.

I. The relation of the Gentile to the Jew, and to the kingdom of the Lord: "*other sheep I have.*"

We speak familiarly of the Jews as the chosen people. With the language of Scripture before us we

cannot speak otherwise. But in estimating the meaning to be attached to the phrase it makes a great difference whether we regard their calling as mainly for their own sake or for the world's. If it was simply for the sake of the joy which they might take in their peculiar privileges, and the hope for themselves which might grow out of them, that God "called them to be a chosen people unto Himself," then it gives us one view, and a very popular one, of election. If on the other hand it was for the sake of the world's culture, on a large scale and in the long run, that they were chosen, if "*not unto themselves but unto us they did minister*" during all the ages of their apparently exclusive calling, then it gives us another view of election, and I venture to think the truer and the nobler. There is no doubt as to what the Jews thought of their calling, and no question as to the pride which it generated. Even Moses saw but dimly the whole range of the Divine purpose, though there are some glorious flashes of a larger vision in his words. But in more than one place he speaks of their peculiar privileges and advantages in a way which could hardly fail to afford ample nourishment for their spiritual pride. They nursed their sense of a special and private favour, little understanding that it was for the sake of the great world that God set them on high as a beacon light, as a sacred fire; and that the time would come when their special privilege and calling would vanish as naturally and inevitably as the stars melt into the dawning day.

They were set to be God's teachers and witnesses to the world. Joseph, Daniel, Paul, understood the mission. They gave light to the nations around them, not hate and frowns. Isaiah understood the whole range of the Divine purpose, as perhaps no other man grasped it under the old dispensation. His prophecy is one grand evangelic poem, in which the glory of Israel was set forth as the day-star of the world. Paul, in his profound argument in Romans xi., works out this thought to its final issues: Israel lived for the Gentiles in the days of its honour and splendour; Israel fell for the Gentiles in the days of its sorrow and shame; Israel shall rise and live again for the Gentiles in the days of its final and blessed restoration, and shall hail the ingathering of the wide, wide human world into the everlasting kingdom of the Lord. They were the elect people—elect as the only begotten Son was elect, for chief ministry to God and to mankind.

The Lord in these words seems to me to stamp this as the true interpretation of the Old Testament dispensation. "*Other sheep I have which are not of this fold.*" He uses here precisely the same term to describe the Gentiles which He had used to describe the Jews, His sheep, of whom He had spoken these words: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth*



*his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him : for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him : for they know not the voice of strangers."* (John x. 1-5.)

The Lord's eye had been on the Gentiles through all the ages of the Jewish calling. His seeming neglect of the gentile world, while He called the Jews out of the world's congregation near unto Himself, was an essential part of His counsel of love and mercy to mankind. He was not alienated from the world in anger, while in sovereign pity He turned benignly to the Jews. There was no alienation, there was no forsaking, there was no sovereign pity for one nation and sovereign coldness and carelessness for the rest. Mercy moved Him to call the Jews to His visible kingdom ; mercy, the working out of far-reaching plans of love, moved Him to leave the Gentiles "*to feel after God, if haply they might find him,*" that their finding Him, or rather being found of Him at length, might through all the ages of man's history be charged with a larger benediction, might minister to a more glorious progress, and might fruit in more abounding bliss. We shall live to see, when we review the whole range of man's history from on high, that God was as careful of the gentile as of the Jewish progress, through all the ages of the elder dispensation ; and that though He hid Himself from the one and revealed Himself to the other, the hiding and the revealing were equally from the fountain of His mercy, while the one

and the other are equally charged with blessing to this age, to every age, to you, to me, to man, through eternity.

*"Other sheep I have,"* He said, addressing the peculiar people; souls belonging to Me as closely as the children of Abraham, My friend; souls over whom My rights are as absolute, and over whom My heart yearns as tenderly, whom it longs, pines, in this dark hour to gather to the embraces of its love. *"Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold:"* that is, say the commentators, not of any fold; stray sheep, foldless, shepherdless, lost on the mountains, wandering by twos and threes about the waste places of the world! I cannot think that this is at all the meaning of the Lord. I cannot doubt that there was a fold of the Good Shepherd in every pagan nation. Even Peter was brought to see that in every nation *"he who feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him."* God did not leave Himself anywhere without witness. Great teachers, men preaching, according to their light, purity, truth, righteousness, and charity, had risen up again and again through the darkness of the pagan night, and had become the leaders of revivals and reformations. Wonderful uprisings of all that is of God in man, wonderful bruising and crushings of all that is of the devil, followed their ministry. Was the unseen helper there, think you, the evil one or the Lord? I cannot doubt that Zerdusht, Confucius, Sakya-Mouni, Socrates, and Epictetus drank in a measure of the fountain of Divine inspiration, and

through the God of righteousness wrought righteousness, through the Lord of truth spake truth to their fellow-men. With much blindness, much that was of the earth earthy, they were shepherds of men under the Chief Shepherd. Alas! I find not that blindness and earthliness have quite vanished from the life of our selectest and most evangelical churches. Just as the Great Shepherd had "*led his people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron,*" but was now about to take them visibly under Divine guidance, so He would now seek and take under His own shepherd's care the outlying flocks of students of Divine mysteries, seekers of the kingdom of God and His righteousness, who were wandering, abandoned mostly by their own teachers, who had corrupted their way through the ages, about this wide, weary, unhomelike world.

## II. The two images, the fold and the flock.

A fold is an inclosure, marked out by definite lines which can be seen and measured: a flock is a company, made determinate by the presence and influence of a leader. The limiting lines are the main suggestion of the one; the person of the leader and his personal relations are the main suggestions of the other. A fold is constantly employed as an image of a church, and is universally recognised; though it is said that when Mr. Ruskin published his "*Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds,*" many farmers invested in the book, to find with amazement that he was writing about churches. The fold represents the churches, the visible limited communities in which men spiritually

congregate, and in which they associate themselves on the ground of common beliefs and "views" of truth and life. Each spiritual fold is marked out by well defined lines of doctrine and discipline, each is clearly and sharply distinguished from its neighbour, though in some of the selectest sects, the "Brethren," for instance, where one might be tempted to look for strong uniting bands, the lines of stern division grow fine and impalpable as hairs. The sheep of the fold too are sure to be well tarred with the badge of the community—Independent, Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, Swedenborgian, Mormon, and are known by the name of the sect to which they belong, wherever they turn.

Since time began it is through sects that men have sought the free and full unfolding of their spiritual life. Christianity, the world religion,—the religion whose key is unity, whose Founder prayed in the most solemn moment of His life, when He was gathering up His strength for the last anguish and the final victory, "*Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word ; that they all may be one : as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us : that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them ; that they may be one, even as we are one ; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one : and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me*" (John xvii. 20-23)—Christianity,

I say, seems but to have multiplied sects and to be the mother of schisms. They have developed themselves with strange rapidity, and striven with the intensest bitterness, since the gospel of charity came into the world. The question occurs, it is pressed home upon us by the divisions and the strifes of Christendom, Why, when, "*there is one body, one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all,*" when there is one Shepherd of the flock, the aspiration of whose heart is unity, cannot there be one fold, one form of doctrine, one mode of government, one system of discipline, one name, and one aspect before the world? For let it be understood that though *we* talk lightly and easily about our differences, and think with some satisfaction that most of them are but skin deep, and that there is substantial unity beneath, to the great mass of the unbelieving and the ignorant our different sects look like different religions. And well they may, when we know so little what spirit we are of. If the poor think and talk of Episcopalians, Independents, and Baptists, as "of different religions," we may thank ourselves mainly; the fierceness and bitterness with which we wrangle can produce no other impression on untutored hearts.

But why so many sects? Why any sects at all? Why not one fold, and one Shepherd? The answer lies in the profound distinction between thought and life, between the intellectual and the spiritual sphere. Thought is manifold, multiform, it tends to distinc-

tions and divisions. Life is simple, single, pure, and tends to unity. The vital attraction of Christ Jesus lays hold on a man in his wholeness, as the magnet seizes the steel dust, and draws him in his wholeness along the path which its energy ordains. But the reason of the attraction, when he comes to analyse it, is manifold. He can see but part of it; he is ever making further discovery of it; and the whole reason, he is conscious, evades his grasp.

Hence we may learn, I believe, the reason why our Lord speaks of one *flock*, and not of one *fold*. Men divide themselves into folds, form themselves into separate churches, partly on the ground of their "views" as to modes of action and administration, and partly on the ground of doctrinal beliefs. The varying views on the first point are due in very large measure to diversities of temperament and to mental constitution or culture; which diversities it would appear that God has no purpose of abolishing; which are part of the method by which He conducts the education and leads forward the progress of mankind. For men, at least till their culture is far more advanced than at present, to settle down to one uniform church system, one mode of church government, one form of church association and activity, would be simply to settle humanity down to dreary monotony, by abolishing or quashing all those wide diversities of habit, character, and propensity, which constitute so much of the interest of life and contribute so largely to the progress of society. As the world is now, various

modes of church association, if men are to be in earnest about it, are as inevitable as various modes of political association; and they are as helpful to the freedom and power of the spiritual life of the community as the play of various national types and political combinations is to the secular activity and progress of mankind. As men are now, we say, with their present culture. There is an organ in man, the godlike reason, which searches for and aims at unity; which ever seeks to harmonize and combine in wider forms of unity that which the speculative sceptical intellect disunites and dissolves. But the full exercise of this faculty is the fruit of the highest culture, and it must be left free to make its unities. To make external forms of unity of importance is to forestall the work of reason, and to frustrate it. The unity will grow as the higher reason develops itself. Cease caring about the folds, as if a fold more or less were a question of vital moment; care for culture, and that which lends importance to the folds will descend in interest, that which belongs to the flock will rise.

But it may be said, the type of all this is fixed for us in the Divine word, and we have nothing to do but to conform to it. In the first place, it is not fixed in the Divine word. The Author of the Christian scheme is not such a bungling workman as to leave room for such myriad questions if He had intended to lay down a clear definite platform of ecclesiastical life. But if it were intended to be fixed for us, we may venture to say that it would make but little

difference. The intellect *will* assert its freedom. Give to it the clearest form of words about the highest matters, it *will* interpret them according to its own bias and pre-judgments. In the matter of the ordinances, one would say, there ought to be no room for doubt as to the meaning and purpose of the Lord ; but, with the very same texts before them, the wisest and most pious disciples of the Saviour come to the most opposite conclusions. In truth, God did not intend to spare us this intellectual strife for the discovery of the right and the true in the conduct of our life. He laid down for us no platform of faith and practice. He gave us a guiding light, and left us to fight out the questions of belief and government for ourselves. Folds are essential under such conditions ; their action and reaction, were Christian spirits but in concord, would but stimulate and develop the universal life.

More profound, and more potent in the formation of the various folds of men, are differences of belief. I have already said that, could Christendom settle down to one creed, as it is trying to do at Rome, it would be equivalent to a stoppage in the pulsations of its life. But why cannot men settle down on what we call the gospel truths, agree to some simple clear definition of them, and be at rest ? In a word, Because the gospel, God's thought in Christ, is infinitely larger than any form which we can create to contain it. Every new creed or portion of a creed is a new protest that the old is more narrow than the mind of God. It must



be so. As men's thoughts are "widened by the process of the suns," they must discover new things in the Divine counsel, and see much which was discovered before in such new lights as to make it new. Every fresh church, if it has any life in it, rests on some forgotten, neglected, or unrecognised portion of the whole truth of God. Destroy the creeds, amalgamate the churches, and you will but shut up God's thoughts to the measures of human thoughts, and will kill at the root the highest spiritual development of mankind.

This is why creeds are so right for the most part in what they affirm, so wrong in what they limit or deny. The affirmation mostly has hold of some substantial feature of Divine truth, never, it may be, brought out into fair prominence till then. But the denials and limitations are the fruit of an attempt to round it off to completeness, and to make it appear to contain the whole counsel of God within its little sphere. The churches, did they but understand it, supplement each other. They each bear witness for some essential part of the Divine counsel, and each is indebted to the other for supplemental influences which make its faith a wider, nobler thing than it would fashion for itself within its private laboratory, in a measure of which we little dream.

But are we living then on bits of truth; each with his private fragment, but with little discernment or sense of the great whole?

"Our little systems have their day,  
They have their day and cease to be;  
They are but broken lights of Thee:  
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they."

Is it but a broken light of God that falls on us? Is the full daylight far above us, far away? Is this all that is in Christianity? God forbid. We *know* in part. We do not live in part, we do not love in part, nor do we know only a broken light of His love. We have *the* truth in the knowledge of the Being who has loved us, has sought us and saved us; a full, whole, satisfying knowledge of Him who is the life may be ours through His love. We may "*go on to comprehend with all saints*"—not in our separate estate does this higher knowledge come, when we are caring about the plan and limit of the fold; only when we are thinking of the character and relations of the flock—"what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, THAT WE MAY BE FILLED WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD."

And here is the principle of unity. Here is the oneness of the flock. We place the plan of the fold in the foreground. It is so much easier to deal with the form than with the spirit; it is so much more possible to indolence to test words, conceptions, definitions, than the inner spirit which lends tone and character to the life. The discords of Christendom rise purely out of this struggling about the form of the fold, as if it were the limit of the flock. From this root spring the bitter controversies which have

rent the church and the world for ages: men have sought unity in that which lives by discriminations and distinctions, which must be in its lower stages—to haunt which lower stages theologians have shown themselves terribly prone—partial, private, and separating; and the unity of Christendom has been shivered to fragments. The concord of Christendom will rise out of the loving recognition of the flock which lives and loves the Master, in all the folds in which varieties of culture and character have scattered it, through which varieties it is working out for itself a larger, richer, freer life. It is deeply significant that it was when Nathanael was thinking, "*Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?*" the Lord found that in his spirit which moved Him to the eulogy, "*Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile.*"

III. The aspiration and prevision of the Lord: "*that they all may be one;*" "*there shall be one flock, and one shepherd.*"

The progress of Christendom lies in the recognition of the truth that the folds must be many, while the flock is but one. The idea of the formal visible kingdom, resting on one creed and ruled by one earthly head, which the papacy has so resolutely struggled for ages to realize, seems to be about to confess itself a failure and to put itself to an open shame. The only possible success within its reach would simply substitute a human kingdom for a Divine. There rises above the wreck the vision of a wider, purer, nobler kingdom, in which the act of fealty will be heart

devotion to the Saviour; in which the subjects will know and cleave to each other as they recognise in each other a spirit which is in concord with the Spirit of the Lord; and in which the bond of relation will be purely spiritual—in that which unites and welds society, instead of, as now, mainly intellectual in that which divides and differentiates men.

And they are but dull observers of the times who cannot see that under the wreck of our doctrinal systems the conception of the one true church is growing. Men of like mind, of one heart, of all creeds, in all communions, are more and more ready to draw together, to confederate, to corporate, and to believe that a wise consideration of their differences may help to enlarge their view of the whole body of Christian truth; while the differences themselves may render possible on a large scale a fuller manifestation of the mind of God to the world. If the conviction grows in each church that sister churches hold clearly something of the Divine counsels which it sees more dimly, we shall arrive at the true principle of charitable judgment. Each fold will in that case be silently widening its sphere of vision, and will be taking into its scheme a fuller measure of the truth of God. Comprehension will then grow nobly; not by paring away as unsubstantial and comparatively worthless that wherein the churches differ, but by building up a larger grander scheme of faith and life. The folds will remain as homes, places of gathering, scenes of fellowship, thought, and consecrated toil; but they

will be abolished as boundaries and barriers : the one flock in its several folds, for diversities will obtain to the end of time, like one nation in its several households, will develop, by a healthy culture of the private and individual, the common and nobler life.

This view of the bearing of these words of Christ does not favour those schemes of "comprehension" which to many able minds seem to be the most ready, if not the most effectual, panacea for the evils of a sectarian church. They attach an undue importance to external and visible unity, and seek to realize it by making light of differences, theological and ecclesiastical, which originally had their root in the deepest convictions, and which can never sink into the region of things indifferent, in an earnest and energetic religious life. The comprehension which would confer on every man who in any vague way called himself a Christian a right to minister in the one all-inclusive national church, could only be discussed as feasible in an age in which theology had fallen into contempt and shame. No doubt this is not a theological generation. The theologians have had it their own way for ages, and have shamefully abused their power ; theology, instead of being made honourable as the queen, has been made hateful as the jealous censor and gaoler of the arts, sciences, and industries of men ; the intellect of the world is in stern revolt against the theologians, and science has now the first place in the interests and activities of the times. But theology is none the less queen, and the intellectual world will be a Babel until

the sovereign re-occupies the throne. What we want is a truer theology, a theology which shall render a fairer account of the mind and operations of the Being who "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that the world through Him might not perish but have everlasting life." Just in proportion as men think deeply and earnestly about Divine things, will they be disposed to confederate with those whose thinkings tend to the same results ; and the folds, for the present at any rate, are likely to endure. This slight estimation of doctrinal questions, which is characteristic of our age, is only very partially a promising feature of it. Doctrine is related to life by the closest associations ; lower the tone of thinking and believing about God and Divine things, and the pitch of the life will inevitably share the degradation in time. Any obliteration of the lines of folds then, which has at the heart of it the thought, It does not matter much what a man believes, as long as his heart is right, is short-sighted and in the end fatal. The unity thus realized is distinctly not the unity which was contemplated by the Lord.

His previsions seem to point precisely in the opposite direction. One flock, and one Shepherd. Let the folds increase or diminish as they may, according to the exigencies of the spiritual vitality and energy of each particular time. But seek to realize the unity, in the spirit of love and of loving obedience to the common Master, to which various folds need in no sense be a hindrance. Let the disciples learn to be quick to

discern and prompt to respond to all that bears the spiritual likeness of Him whom they supremely love, in whatever fold it may disclose itself; and then the vision of the church, the dream of the world, the hope of the Saviour's heart, will become a solid reality. As in the Father's house there are many mansions but one home, so in the world there will be many folds, but one flock and one Shepherd. They all will be one, as Christ and the Father are one, and the world will believe at length that Christ came forth from God.

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## II.

### POTTER AND CLAY.

“Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus?”—Rom. ix. 20.

Most unquestionably yes, if “the thing formed” be a thinking, sentient being, and be formed to moan and groan and writhe eternally. If St. Paul means here that God has the right to make, and exercises the right to make, one soul to eternal salvation and another to eternal perdition, the doomed reprobate soul would have supreme right to say *Why hast thou made me thus* to its Creator, and to utter in the face of the universe its protest against the righteousness of such a God. That soul might writhe in the grasp of One whom it could not but regard as an almighty tyrant, and might close its lips in sullen despair; but its right (if anything of the nature of right would in that case be left in the creation) to question the decree of its Creator would be indisputable; and as indisputable its right, if it had but the power, to rebel against His reign.

And yet this is what, by our current interpretations of this passage, we make St. Paul to mean; this is the false witness for God which a powerful if not popular school of theology makes him bear. This ninth chapter



of the Romans is confessedly one of the dark and difficult passages of the New Testament. Consciously or unconsciously we avoid dwelling upon it. We either omit it, or we hurry over the deeper questions which it propounds. We have an uneasy feeling that there is a very dark and terrible meaning hidden somewhere in its language, a meaning which would perplex and perhaps bewilder us if we took it fairly into our understandings and laid its burden on our hearts. And so we shut the door on it, and try to forget it. How many readers of the Bible, who just read for their own comfort and consolation, fairly face the questions which these words seem to propound? How many ask themselves resolutely, could St. Paul have meant by them what the dominant school of theology for ages past has supposed him to mean, or if not, what other and nobler meaning can we honestly draw from his words?

The popular interpretation with a large and influential school is something like this. The right of God, as Creator, is absolute. He only can be an end to Himself. He has one thing to consider and aim at, His own glory; and if His glory is attained by the salvation of an elect company and the perdition of a great multitude, not chosen but *left* to perish, for no special malignity or deformity of their own in comparison with the saved, the sentence, *Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God; shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus*, is a valid bar to the appeal of

man's reason against the decree; for it is simply, blankly impious to question the wisdom or the justice of His ways. It is to be noted however that the bar to the question and protest is always offered by those who have the best of all possible reasons for acquiescence. It is the saints, the elect few in all ages, the predestined heirs of glory, who lift up pious hands in horror when a poor reprobate outcast, with misery within him and hell before him, dares to moan out to his Maker, *Why hast thou made me thus?*

Surely we must lay it down as a fundamental principle that a Creator is under an obligation as well as a creature. Even of the great God the writer of the treatise to the Hebrews is not afraid to say that there was a course which it became Him to pursue. If a man, for instance, had it in his power to call into being, at will, either a bright, strong, healthy, joyous nature, to which life would be one long delight, or a sickly, deformed, malignant, wretched object, to whom life would be one long pain, and he chose deliberately to call the wretch into being and not the angel, would not all righteous souls have the right to cry shame? How many noble men and women are there who resolve, and maintain their resolve, not to marry, because there is some dark mental or physical infirmity in their blood; and they will not risk the possibility of their spreading the taint in new and untouched homes. We honour their resolution as just and noble; but we dare, some of us, to attribute to God a principle of action which traverses

all its justice and nobleness. We believe, too many of us, that He is capable of bringing into the world, age after age, millions of immortal souls, inevitably doomed to an eternal anguish, of which the undying worm and the unquenchable fire are faint and far off images; and that then He claims the right to silence their questions and choke their protests by a naked and tremendous assertion of His sovereignty, which leaves them to moan in sullen or to madden in furious despair.

If I could believe what men have believed and preached about God, it would simply madden me. No words could utter the protest of one's spirit against such a jealous capricious tyrant as some dare to represent Him. It is this false witness for God which has been at the root of the unbelief and atheism which are the chronic maladies of Christian society. And the unbelief would have been far sadder and deeper than it is, if the personal spirit and ministry of these perverse theologians had not corrected the narrowness and bitterness of their dogmas; if, dark and selfish as their creed may be, their lives had not shone with a benigner, yea with a diviner light. The difficulties are dark enough, even on the largest and most loving view which we can take of the methods and the ways of God. But a just view of the argument of the apostle in this passage may help us to see, not the exact harmony of every word and act of the Divine Ruler with the principles of righteousness—that is more than we can hope to discover

with our partial and narrow vision—but that a harmony is possible, and the direction in which it lies. Whereas, if we allow ourselves to think that Paul is here treating of the eternal salvation or perdition of beings who have the power of suffering or of enjoying intensely, to whom life may be one long eternal draught of bliss or one long eternal moan of pain, and that he closes the mouths of those who are appointed to perdition by the sentence, "*Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God, whose rights over His creatures are absolute,*" we lay down a principle which I at any rate find it impossible to reconcile with any honest ideas of righteousness of any sort; rather than believe which about the God whom I worship and serve, I would pray for annihilation, that I might be out of the bounds of the universe in which such principles are recognised by its Ruler, for ever.

But happily this is not the true teaching of the Scriptures. A careful consideration of the real bearing of this dark, difficult, and, as commonly interpreted, tremendous passage, will convince us that St. Paul is not treating of the salvation or perdition of individual souls, destined to bear the burden of existence sadly or joyfully through eternity, but rather of the perdition or salvation of peoples, of kings, armies, nations, in their temporal political relations, which bear very powerfully indeed on their spiritual and eternal interests, but do not carry the question of the salvation or damnation of the individual beings who

compose them in their train. Jacob, Esau, Pharaoh, stand here as representatives of great human communities; and God's ways with them are set forth as the keys to the methods of His providence in dealing with the larger masses and movements of humanity in all regions and in all ages of the world. There are two spheres, so to speak, of God's relation to and dealing with mankind. The one is outward and providential, the other is inward and spiritual. The one concerns all that order and arrangement of His providence by which He appoints the bounds of man's habitation, with his circumstances and conditions; some of them, as far as we can see, highly favourable, others as highly unfavourable to the culture of his higher nature, and to his spiritual and eternal welfare. The other concerns his relations as a spirit to the Father of spirits, according to which his personal destiny, his bliss or woe, is settled for time and for eternity. The first of these spheres of the Divine action is that, as far as I understand it, which the apostle is contemplating in this chapter; and to this the principles which he lays down, and the bar which he opposes to questions and protests, righteously apply. If the two spheres were identical, if God's spiritual relation to a human soul could be invariably calculated, as we take for granted in much of our popular talk about the heathen and the poor that it may be calculated, from the place of his birth or the outward condition of his life, then I confess that I could see no possible justification of the ways of God

to man. But, blessed be God, we are able to take a larger, a more loving, a more hopeful view of His methods with mankind. The question of acceptance with God is not one of Jew or Gentile, Catholic or Protestant, Christian or heathen, but "*in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.*" It was to one of the most idolatrous peoples within the bounds of the whole civilised world that Paul testified, "*he is not far from every one of us.*" Not far for what? To reprobate, to curse, to doom? or to help, to bless, to save?

Let me try to illustrate the position by an instance which will easily bring it home to the understanding of the reader. The Roman church—and till recently the whole Christian church entertained the same idea—holds practically that salvation is very much a matter of latitude and longitude, and of those accidents which belong to the outer sphere of man's life. Salvation is of the Roman church, the Romanist holds; much as it was held of old that "salvation is of the Jews." There is a heathen nation, let us say, outside the pale of the church. Ignorant of Christ, unbaptized, they are doomed according to a ruling school to inevitable perdition. But the church has planted a mission there, and begins to preach and to baptize vigorously. As far as they can baptize there is salvation; where they cannot reach there is perdition. It is mere matter of accident where the preachers land, and where they first set up their tabernacle. One tribe may live on this side of a mountain range, and be within easy

reach; another tribe may be beyond the mountain range, and be beyond easy reach: the one, through that accident, may be baptized and saved; the other may be left unbaptized to perish. Would the men, who by this mere accident would be left to perish, have no right to say to the Creator, "Why hast Thou made me and placed me here, when, a few miles east or west, my habitation would have brought eternal blessings within reach of my hand?"

It seems to me that, if this were the principle of God's ways, such a man would have a supreme right to question, complain, and protest against those accidents which made the difference to him of an eternity of sorrow or of joy. But this is the principle on which we constantly assume that God is acting. We may shrink from the naked statement of it; but we should be startled to see how it really lies behind much of our popular modes of thinking and teaching about God and His ways. And we have the same thing close at our own doors. There is an infant dying, and unbaptized. A High Church clergyman is sent for. He is long in coming, the child is swiftly dying. The parents are in an agony of fear lest he should come too late. His foot may stumble, he may miss a conveyance, he may forget the number of the house, while the last sands of life are ebbing away. But he believes, and the parents have been taught to believe, that on his arrival in time are hanging consequences of tremendous moment to that infant, which touch the destinies of eternity. I say again, if

this be the principle on which God administers the government of our spirits and settles our eternal future, the thing formed has supreme right to say to Him that formed it, *Why hast Thou made me thus*; and to refuse to live, if any choice were left to it, under the government of such a Lord.

But let us look at it in another and in the orthodox way—orthodox I venture to think in the orthodoxy of the truth. Suppose that a man, born by no act of his own in a heathen land, far from the “*light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*,” could become conscious of all that he was missing by his distance from civilisation and the gospel. But suppose that at the same time it could be revealed to him that his eternal salvation depended on conditions quite close to him, and within reach of his hand. Let him understand that a wise, just, and far seeing Lord had appointed the bounds of his habitation, with all its trials, difficulties, and disadvantages, and that the Lord had plans far beyond his ken to develop by these outward arrangements of human society, for him and for mankind; that God would not deal with him according to what he had not, but according to what he had, the wise and faithful use of the small talent entrusted to him; and that there was a long eternity before him, in which present losses would be compensated and the mystery of present difficulties and disadvantages made plain,—I think in that case his right of protest would be taken away. His wise, right thought would be, These



outward things belong to a scheme of providential government too vast for me to master, too profound for me to criticise; I do not understand the terms of the problem, I must leave it to the solution of a wiser hand; I trust God to deal with me in loving righteousness as to the welfare of my immortal spirit, the rest I will try to leave to Him without complaint or murmur, until in His own good times and ways He sees good to make the mystery of His dealings plain.

Now let us look at the case which is presented to us in this chapter. Jacob and Esau first appear upon the scene. "Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."

Now taking a broad view of the bearings of this passage, is it possible to believe that the words, "*Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated*," express God's decisions as to their eternal destiny? What is the calling of which such frequent mention is made in this epistle? It is to position, privilege, influence—the outer blessings of the kingdom; which, as Peter learnt through Cornelius, God is able to more than compensate by inward spiritual influence. Is there anything in this passage, or in the calling of Jacob and the rejection of Esau, which forecloses the question of Esau's eternal destiny? Surely not. We know but little about him, but the little that we do know presents him in rather a noble and generous light. When he and Jacob met, the outward signs of grace were hardly with the chosen one. To suppose that this national rejection of Esau and election of Jacob carried the eternal destinies of the men themselves is to darken utterly the whole counsel of God. But then is it not written, "*Ye know that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance though he sought it carefully with tears*"? What does that mean?—that God would not let him repent, or would not save him if he did repent? To suppose this

is to fly in the face not of the spirit and principle of Christianity only, but also of the express testimony of God as to the law of His dealings with men under the Old Testament dispensation, which is very fully developed in Ezekiel xviii. 20-23 and xxxiii. 11-20. There was nothing in God's decree against Esau which touched either his salvability or his salvation. We call him profane—a man haunting the threshold, and not the shrine; in a national sense it describes him and his people perfectly, and certainly by his contempt of his birthright he set himself on the highway to demoralisation and spiritual death. But the words "*he found no place of repentance*" simply mean that he found no way to change his father's mind about the birthright; he lost the honour and the power of the second father and founder of the sacred line, and he lost it for ever.

From Jacob and Esau Paul passes on to Pharaoh and Israel, in illustration of the principle which God announces to Moses (ver. 15); not at all as defining the mode of His dealing with the chosen race as compared with the heathen, but rather His method within the bosom of the church, the chosen race, itself; destroying some and saving others according to His will—that is, according to essential Divine righteousness, which comprehends in its bosom pity, mercy, patience, gentleness, and charity. A reference to Exodus xxxiii. 12-19 will show that it is entirely a question of God's methods within the bosom of the church. The principle on which the "*I will*

*have mercy on whom I will have mercy*" proceeds He Himself in Exodus xxxii. 31-35 plainly expounds. So that it is God's ways with His chosen people in which Paul seeks an illustration of His method in ruling a wider world. And here too I think that we are greatly too quick to suppose that the "plaguing" and "destruction" signify eternal as well as temporal death. *"But with many of them God was not well pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness:"* surely, some will say, that implies perdition. It is not so sure. Moses sinned, and God was displeased with him, and his "carcase fell in the wilderness." He fell and was buried outside the promised land. Do we therefore hold that he was excluded from the final and everlasting rest? We see that it is not so sure. We are too hasty in taking perdition for granted; we are harder to each other than God is to us; we know not what manner of spirit we are of, because we know not Him.

The case of Pharaoh may seem to present a different and more difficult aspect. But I am persuaded that precisely the same principles are illustrated by it, the same idea is its key.

We have to do here with a vast national movement, the magnitude and importance of which to the then world it is difficult for us fully to estimate. "History," says Von Bunsen, "was born that night, when Moses led forth his people out of Egypt." It was the first grand step in that progress of humanity which we name civilisation, on the path which we are treading

still. We, and all the world to the end of time, have to do directly with these great transactions. It was for man, and not for themselves, that "*with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm*" God led that people forth. The very essence of the matter was the mighty hand; the most important element in the influence of the exodus on the east at that crisis, and on the whole world's history, was the visible hand of God: God made national pride, prejudice, and selfishness the means of revealing that Hand and illustrating its action. He found in that proud, idolatrous, priest-ridden Egypt a vessel fitted, not which He had fitted—mark the difference of expression in ver. 22, "*fitted to destruction*," and in ver. 23, "*which he had afore prepared unto glory*"—but which He found fitted to destruction. He held it up on high as an example; He humbled it, broke it, crushed it, buried its wreck beneath the Red Sea waves, not because He hated Egypt and would blot it from the face of the earth for ever, but because He loved it in the harmony of the wide human brotherhood; while this stern chastisement of national pride and blindness was a part of His discipline, whereby He was seeking to bless on a larger scale both Egypt and mankind.

We have not here to deal with special judgments on Pharaoh, as, so to speak, a private individual sinner, nor deliverances of Israel as a private and individual saint. Great national movements are in question, which raise the one and depress the other, save the one and destroy the other, but leave the

question of the personal relations of the individuals to God dependent on precisely the same conditions as those on which they depended before. And the same principles, the same processes, are at work still in the same sphere. God is constantly humbling, casting down, and for a time destroying nations, because of the folly or madness of their rulers. And in some cases, as in the Stuarts of England and the Bourbons of France and Spain, it is as though after a certain point had been reached He hardened the heart of the dynasty as He hardened Pharaoh's, that the inevitable catastrophe might be the more tremendous, and more full of impressive teaching through the visible unveiling of His hand. But to suppose that this dishonouring and casting down the thrones of despots, or the peoples who have patiently submitted themselves to tyrannous sway, implies the determination that those on whom the strokes of judgment fall should die the death eternal, is to contradict every principle which God expounds in the Scripture as the rule of His dealings, and to make it harder, far harder, than it is for men to believe in a merciful and righteous Lord. I maintain then that the questions in this chapter concern national rather than individual interests; the movements, the risings and the fallings, the honour and the dishonour, the salvation and the perdition of peoples, rather than the destiny of individual immortal souls.

But let us not dream that we have got rid of all

the difficulty, and dissipated all the obscurity, by this explanation. Far from it. There is enough, and more than enough, that is very dark and inscrutable remaining. But at any rate we get rid of blank palpable unrighteousness. There is mystery enough left in God's outward dealings with men and with peoples by the ordinances of His providence; for we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that these outward things do tell very mightily on the inner character and the destiny of men. Why is an Englishman born in England in the full flood of the light of revelation? Why is a cannibal born in the South Seas, with traditions and habits which distinguish him unfavourably from all but the basest of the brutes? Why is this man nursed in a genial Christian home, with a mother's cherishing care around his infant steps and dawning life; while another is cast forth from a vicious home to patter barefoot on the wet stones, to fight the dogs in the kennel for food, and to grow as familiar with curses and obscenities as the other is with hymns and prayers? Why through all these ages has Christendom been but a bright spot, no more, in the midst of the great circle of heathen gloom? Why am I what I am? why are you what you are? Why these natural connate tempers, passions, proclivities? why these special temptations? why these wretched home influences? why these thousand accidents, which make life so sorrowful, so like a dreary desperate struggle against fate? Or why on the other hand these helps and ministries, this buoyant

spirit, this natural gay glad heart, which make life a festal march, and fill the atmosphere of the world with light and joy? Who can answer these questions? Who can see where the answer to many of them lies? "*Clouds and darkness are round about him*"—it must be so while we gaze through the mists, and His ways are far up above us in the height—"but justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne." But to all such questions and protests St. Paul most righteously opposes the rebuke of the text, "*Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God.*" You do not understand the very terms of the problem; you cannot comprehend the reason of this order of God's providence; you cannot tell how things are working on you; nor can you know what God purposes to bring out of the most sorrowful lot, the most dire disadvantages in time. You must get up to the height of heaven, and out into the horizon of eternity, to understand it; and till then possess your soul in patience, and be at peace. Dare not to question Him who has under His righteous rule the destinies of universal being; dare not to doubt His love who has sealed it with the gift of His well-beloved Son. "*Consider the years of the right hand of the Most High,*" and be still. Choke the protest, dry the tear, hush the moan. Eternity is thine, to study and to understand the methods of God's discipline, the order of His ways; and to learn to cry as you review the mighty sum of His thoughts,—“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge



of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

### III.

## "SELL THAT THOU HAST, AND GIVE TO THE POOR."

"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow Me."—*MATT. xix. 21.*

A PROFOUND German thinker declares his judgment that in no book are there to be found such revolutionary utterances as in the gospels. And from one point of view surely he is right. The gospel is radical in the most absolute sense of the word. It searches to the very roots of things. Things in their simplicity, relations in their purity, ideas in their transcendency, powers in their spring,—these are what the Saviour deals with. All shows and shams are easily pierced through by the keen shafts of His words. Traditions, habits, conventional notions and usages, seem to vanish like vapours before His piercing breath. The light floods all the air while He is speaking, and all things are made manifest—manifest as they are before the face of God and before the angels, undimmed by the grossness, undistorted by the refractions, of the vapours which brood in the atmosphere of this lower world.

There are sentences of Christ's which seem to

strike at the root of the constitution and the institutions of society. "*Labour not for the meat which perisheth.*" "*Take no thought for the morrow.*" "*Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor.*" How is society possible under these conditions? They reduce the naked human spirit to its simplest and most necessary conditions and relations. Surroundings, circumstances, become nothing; its essential being, a spirit before the Father of spirits, is all. Nor is the gospel the only profoundly radical commandment which in one shape or another reaches us from heaven. In times of intense, heart-searching, heart-crushing sorrow, we are conscious of the same isolation, and are able to fathom the deep meaning of the Saviour's words. A great sickness overwhelms us; at once all the joy passes out of life's common experiences, all the glory out of the familiar splendour of the world. The sunlight and all the garish beauty which it unveils to us—the eye sickens to behold it! Let fall the curtain; my delight in this world's joy and beauty is dead! Life's gay pleasures—music, and art, and literature, the dance, the wine-cup, the song—we loathe the memory of them. Our riches, our business transactions and combinations, our far-reaching plans and hopes, all which *made* our lives yesterday, to-day has vanished like a vapour. "*As a dream when one awaketh,*" the whole world of our familiar occupations and pursuits is gone. Or it may be that a darling child, the light of the home, the life of the heart, is moaning and gasping in a death agony.

*"Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor."* 43

Then a yet dearer world, the world of our familiar friendships and our common loves, seems to fade in the distance. We could hear quite calmly the sentence of its utter banishment, if this dearest thing might but be spared—that will be sufficient henceforth to constitute the happiness of life.

So that Christ but works in harmony with all our deepest and most searching experiences, when His words seem to detach us from our surroundings and make us realize the naked relations and needs of our spiritual nature. A certain isolation from the whole world of our daily tasks and pleasures is sometimes forced upon us. As men awaking from a dream, or emerging into the cold clear air on which the calm and silent stars are shining, after being entranced by the impersonation of some consummate actor who has held them in his spells, so the whole world of our surroundings seems to roll up as a scroll and vanish, when by the stern hand of God's discipline, or by the still sterner lips of Christ, the roots of things are searched out and laid bare. In such moods, when the solemn awful forms of the things unseen are unveiled, men have sold every possession, broken away from home and every friend, counted the richest treasures, the dearest bonds, but as dung beneath their feet, if they might but taste more fully thereby the ineffable sweetness of the Divine love. But then, under such conditions, what becomes of society? *"Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor."* The words are terribly clear, sharp, and stern. Francis

of Assisi heard them once. Straying into a church, they were in the lesson for the day which was read. The words seized on his conscience; they haunted him, they tormented him. He sold everything but the bare garment which clothed him. Still the obedience seemed to fall short of the Saviour's command. So he stripped himself even of his poor raiment; and they clothed him there in the church, for very shame, in a peasant's tunic, which he wore on till death.

Nothing is so radical, nothing has proved itself so radical, as these words of Christ. But then again we say, What becomes of human society, civilisation, culture, industry, progress? Are they all the dreams of a sensual imagination? Are they all "*of the earth, earthy*;" the fruits of man's unhallowed freedom; manifestations of the power of carnal will and passion, working out its own self-elected ends in defiance of the purposes and the counsels of God? There are sentences in the gospels which tempt us to think so. Reading some passages, we are almost driven to believe that human society and all which grows out of it must be a huge glaring anomaly in the eye of heaven—an abortion, a monster, having no sort of right to be, in celestial judgment, no sort of harmony with that serene and awful order which sustains the orbits and rules the motions of the stars. Was the hermit right after all? Is detachment from earth and everything earthly the true wisdom?—the soul alone in the desert, eating, drinking, and sleeping as little as may be to live; shunning human converse and all

*"Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor."* 45

the memories of the world which it had forsaken, and regarding all its art, literature, work, recreation, and dear domestic delights as the devil's trap to ensnare souls to their ruin? There are passages in the gospels, and here and there in the epistles, which tempt us to ask, Is not this the only true, the only Christian policy of life?

But then against this idea, which is very easily, very naturally suggested by certain words of our Lord, there are considerations of the gravest kind. His life teaches quite a different lesson; and we must remember that He Himself refers us to His life as the great revelation. The gospel declares that "*the Life is the Light of men.*" The Lord lived by no means a hermit's life. There was one very closely related to Him, in such close communion with His work that men mused in their hearts whether he were the Christ or no, who did live a hermit's life in the deserts. "*And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.*" His ascetic spirit and habit of life gave him a tremendous power over the whole population of Judæa. It seemed as if by his single human strength he would effect the grand revolution, and complete a reformation which might fulfil the people's dream and hope of a visible kingdom of the Lord. But Christ did not go to the deserts; He did not clothe Himself in a prophet's tunic; He did not live on a hermit's food. Deliberately He chose *not* to make these the instruments of His power.

He elected *not* to walk in the path which conducted the Baptist to the most brilliant reputation and the most triumphant success. "*The Son of man came eating and drinking.*" The scoff which they flung at Him was, "*Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.*" He mixed freely with the world. Assemblies and banquets were often hallowed by His presence. His first miracle was the creation of wine at a marriage feast; an occasion and an element which it is probable that the Baptist would have abhorred. By all possible means He sought to consecrate the experiences and occasions of life, and not to condemn them; His life is full of benediction for the plodders and the wayfarers in the busy work-a-day world.

Again, the men whom He gathered round Him, and whom He filled with His Spirit, whom He expressly designated and inspired to carry out His designs and complete His work, did not betake themselves to the deserts. The city streets, the synagogues, the temples, the market-places, wherever men most thronged, there they were to be found. They lived, like Christ, simple natural lives, after the fashion of their fellow-men around them; and they showed in their spirit and their habits not the faintest disposition to condemn or to disdain the common interests, pursuits, activities, and relationships of men. And those men, so to speak, were part of Christ. Their life-work was part of His life-work. He himself knew perfectly that His life could only become

*"Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor."* 47

complete through death and that which was to grow out of it. He must die, to live as the Redeemer; and they were directly under His inspiration, that they might make the "*decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem*" a living power in the world. Open their epistles—the inspired writings from which we learn all that the life of Christ signified, all that God meant it to accomplish. There is enough in the new ideas and principles which are fermenting there, to make the most tremendous revolution in the world; to turn the world upside down, as was actually feared in those days, and to subvert from the foundations the whole order of human society. But how little was actually overturned. The conservative element is probably the most conspicuous element in the epistles. The relations of society were gravely threatened by this new doctrine. How could master and slave, ruler and subject, soldier and citizen, husband and wife, father and child, subsist and carry on their relations in the presence of a doctrine which declared—"*All ye are brethren;*" "*Call no man master;*" "*If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple;*" "*There is neither Greek nor Jew; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus*"? But the apostolic epistles are full of reverence for all the relations and institutions of society. They will suffer none of them, not even that terrible one of master and slave, to be



violently dealt with. They make it manifest, if word of man can make anything manifest, that it was the will of the Lord who inspired them that the order of society should stand on Divine right, and develop itself with Divine freedom and force. They taught that their Master came, not to accomplish a work of subversion, but a work of restoration, regeneration, renewal of vital springs. He came to abolish nothing that has grown honestly out of the human, but to surround it with a purer, a diviner atmosphere, that it might purge itself of its grossness, and renew at the celestial fountain the currents of its life.

A further and yet larger proof that it is the will of God that the order of human society should stand, and develop itself in Christ, is to be drawn from the history of Christendom. If Christ meant to set before men's minds an ideal of human life which involved in its purest form detachment from the world in the ascetic sense, and entire occupation with, absorption in, the things not seen and eternal, it is incredible that the development of Christian society, under the influence of Christian ideas, and of the living Spirit whom the Father hath sent into the world, should have assumed the form which we behold in history. As matter of fact, Christianity has built the world of human society, with all its interests and possessions, on a yet firmer basis. It has revealed God as its author and founder; it has recognised Him as its chief architect and director. Under that guidance, under the touch of that shaping hand,

society has clothed itself with new beauty, crowned itself with new splendour. Art, science, politics; home life, state life, church life; colonization, commerce, industry, and war,—everything which man has to do with, everything which enters into the completeness of his life, has grown lusty and strong under its fostering breath. Liberty has attended everywhere the advance of the gospel, thought has been stimulated, imagination has been quickened, the relations of men have been purified and elevated, the poor have been taken into the fold of the commonwealth, the prodigals and outcasts have been sought out and reclaimed. That sin which creates the misery, and which murders the beauty and the joy of life, has been rebuked and grappled with; that charity which makes the blessedness of souls, of homes, of states, has been cherished and established as the guiding principle of Christian society; though, alas, how far is it from reigning still! In a word, Christ has cast in His Divine lot with civilisation, culture, and progress, in hearts, in homes, in kingdoms, in the great human world. All which aims at detachment from the world's work and life, and sends men into the deserts, physical, mental, or moral, that they may brood there over what they take to be their souls' interests, and dream the hermit's dream of perfection, is unchristian as well as inhuman, and must perish, nay is perishing, before "the breath of the mouth, and the brightness of the coming" of the Lord Jesus.

We conclude then from these considerations that

Christ did not intend to set the perfect image of a Christian life, that is of a human life, before us in these words. It looks like it at first sight; and the words, "*if thou wilt be perfect,*" taken out of the whole harmony of the Saviour's teaching and influence, might lead us to the conclusion that there is but one perfect form of a Christian life in His judgment,—entire and formal surrender of all the powers and all the possessions to the work of teaching and evangelizing mankind. He did not mean this; He could not mean it. The question is, what did He precisely mean?

There are some, I imagine, who are not a little tormented by the stringency of these words, who imagine that the Saviour means something as follows:—This which I set before you is the true, the complete perfection. If a man will aim at the highest, and will seek the most complete fulfilment of the will of God, he must aim at something like this. True, there are lower orders of perfection: there is a poorer life with a poorer crown, which Christ does not absolutely condemn; He does not charge sin against the poor dull plodder along the world's highways; He would even sternly rebuke the ascetic who should speak with a kind of lofty contempt of the grovelling lives of the men who are buying and selling and getting gain all their days. It is not absolutely sin against Christ if we do not climb to these lofty heights of self-denial and self-sacrifice; His smile, kind, patient with our weakness, will still be on our homes

*"Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor."* 51

and on our tasks. But then we are weakly and consciously falling short of the highest. We fail to raise our aspirations to the perfection to which these words of the Saviour point us, "*our spirits cleave unto the dust;*" and though we go about our daily tasks in the world with a peaceful sense that Christ is not frowning on them, nay is ready in a measure to bless them, we fear that we are not living the life of which He made us capable; we seem to content ourselves with something below the strain of the purest perfection; we live therefore under the shadow of our own rebuke and condemnation; our life as compared with an apostle's is but as that of the helot to the free citizen; we can but be as the hewers of wood and the drawers of water to the elect congregation of the Lord through eternity. This is the saddening view which many earnest and high-minded disciples take of this passage, and it greatly depresses them. But neither thus do we arrive, it seems to me, at the true meaning of the Lord.

Surely the sentence ought to be read with the moral emphasis on the word "*thou.*" If *thou*, such as thou art, with thy temperament and capacity, with thy visions and aspirations, if *thou* wilt be perfect, sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and come follow Me. But that man, Lazarus for instance (whom Jesus also loved), let him remain in his home, let him till his fields, let him entertain the Master as his guest, let him make a loving home with his sisters; and thus let him attain to his perfection—a perfec-

tion as noble, as beautiful, as much needed in the universe as thine.

We none of us, I fear, believe heartily in that wonderful passage of St. Paul in 1 Cor. xii., in which he speaks of the various gifts distributed by the self-same Spirit, after the likeness of the senses and organs in the body; each as noble, beautiful, and honourable as its fellow, and each having its own particular perfection to strive after, which is needed quite as pressingly as any other in the complete order of the commonwealth of God. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? No; we recognise at once clearly enough that it is not, that it cannot be so: "*If the whole body were the eye, where were the hearing?*" No, we cannot all be teachers, prophets, apostles. But we recognise it, many of us, with a kind of sadness, as though we were adding mentally, Would God that it could be, for it is the highest life, the only completely noble life; would to God we could make it ours; ours is but a poor life in comparison with theirs! Very likely; but the poverty does not mean that the function is essentially less noble, but that you use it less nobly. You may make it poor and mean, but it does not debase or impoverish you.

God has thus variously endowed and compacted humanity, that there may be many forms of perfection; that each nature may have its own particular aspiration, its own ideal life; and that His kingdom may grow rich through these manifold varieties of capacity and activity, each of which has its sphere ordained in

the great human hierarchy, and a place of abundant honour which none but itself can fill. There is something in the heroic forms of life, grand in visible action and suffering, which attracts and inspires us ; but then they must be visibly heroic, great in the eyes of the world, confessed and honoured of all. But the silent heroisms, of which the world rarely hears, are as great in the eye of heaven, and abound in every lot. Charles Lamb, under all his rare quaint humour, his listless indolent ways, lived a life of quiet heroism, such as few great captains or teachers who have filled the world with the glare or the glow of their heroic deeds have ever attained to. There is room and opportunity in every lot to cultivate to their full strain qualities and faculties, which the greatest of apostles will recognise as kin in the eternal fellowships of the celestial world.

So here : "*if thou wilt be perfect, sell that thou hast and give to the poor.*" " Ah," says one, " that is a perfection infinitely above me ! " Not so. Say rather, That is a perfection which is out of my sphere ; were I other than I am, were I like that young ruler, I would aim at that as the perfect form of my life ; but being what I am, bound by manifold obligations with which I believe that my Maker has bound me, under a law of duty to kindred and dependants, with a business to carry on, a home to rule and nourish, a definite work to do within the circle of the world's daily customary activity, I have another perfection to aim at, which if I am but faithful I may make in the sight of God and the angels not less beautiful, lustrous, and Divine

This young ruler came to Christ with a question which revealed at once the intense earnestness of his heart. St. Mark, after his manner, adds some graphic touches in his narrative, which unfold more fully the meaning of the scene. "*And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, . . . Thou knowest the commandments, . . . and he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.*" (Mark x. 17-22.) This young ruler, very perfect in the legal righteousness, was yet unsatisfied. He had a large idea, a beautiful vision of perfection, and his soul strained to realize it. He was one of those natures whose chief concern in life is to work out those higher problems of the spirit which leave a man little rest, and as little zest for much of the work of this world, when once they have seized on the imagination and occupied the heart. The whole law as he had known it he had kept from his youth up. But there was that within him which obedience failed to satisfy. His soul was crying out for God, for the living God. He came running and kneeling to the new Teacher, whose doctrine seemed

so full of vital light and energy: an ardent, impassioned, enthusiastic nature; a nature which would be a perpetual torment to itself if its highest cravings were not satisfied, if it were not striving after the purest ideal. Jesus looking upon him loved him. He saw the inward consuming eagerness. He saw a heart there which would fret and wear itself out in any but the simplest and most harmonious sphere. "*One thing I do,*" must be the motto of such a life. Did the Lord discern too one dark vein which is constantly found mingling with the finer stuff of the noblest natures; one passion which, if it had its way, would bury the whole in wreck? And so He opened to him *his* true career, which alone would satisfy the craving and fulfil the aspiration of that particular nature—a nature which could find no true rest, no pure joy, but in complete self-devotion to the service of mankind. "*He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*" The Lord had struck the one blot in an otherwise grandly composed and noble nature; the one passion which, like St. Augustine's sensual fascination, held him back from the true work of his life. There was no rest for him till that was finally mastered and expelled, and his every energy and faculty were strained to the utmost in the work of the kingdom, which in those days stood in special need of such forms of self-devotion. Forms, I say, for of the self-devotion itself it stands equally in need in every age. For that man with his passionate ideal longings, his easily besetting sin, and the cares of his great estate, which



would be a burden to him and ultimately a torment, though something within him still clung to it with tenacious grasp, there was no other perfection than that which St. Paul in his way, the highest, and St. Bernard and St. Francis in their way, aimed at—“*Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come and follow me.*”

But is there a “Go and do thou likewise” necessarily implied in these words of our Lord? Assuredly not; or we must close our eyes to the whole teaching of our Saviour’s ministry, of the apostolic epistles, and of the history of the Christian world. For many a man, for most men, for you probably, it would be simply the wrong thing to do; a straight and swift way, though no ignoble one, to make shipwreck of life. There is no greater hindrance to the true and free development of humanity than the idea which a misreading of this passage has helped to foster, that there is but one absolute form of Christian perfection, which all Christian men and women are bound to set before them and realize as far as they may; which form is exhibited in the words of our text. This idea reigned tyrannously in Europe through the whole mediæval period. All secular life was under a kind of ban. The only life recognised as “religious” was modelled upon the image supposed to be set before us in the young ruler’s interview with our Lord. The truth is that no *form* of life which we can imagine and set before ourselves as our ideal can exhaust the suggestions and inspirations of the life and the words of Christ. Every form and quality of character can find its own par-

ticular perfection imaged forth in Him. The artist, the scholar, the teacher, the soldier, the ruler of a state, has a heroism quite as grand and noble to manifest, to the unseen eyes at any rate, in hating the evil and the base, in clinging to the noble and the good, in his own particular calling, as the most devoted apostle or the most saintly ascetic. Let each one keep in his own plane of progression. Let each one aim at that to which the mortifying of the fleshly mind in his own God-ordained vocation will conduct him. Aiming at a kind of perfection which may lie in the plane of the orbit of another nature, but is clearly not in his own; trying to be perfect by doing something or sacrificing something which might lie in the path of an apostle's duty, but which no higher will claims at his hand, because he has quite as noble, quite as heroic work of another kind to accomplish, is a grievous stumbling-block in the way of some of the noblest natures—or rather let us call it a meteor of imagination, which, mistaken for a star, may easily lure a richly freighted nature among quicksands, in which all its priceless treasure may be wrecked and lost.

*"But Jesus looking upon him loved him."* Surely, we think, to those whom He loves He would point out the highest path. Most surely; the highest for *them*. But He "loved Lazarus" too, and it would seem that to him He pointed out quite another path. To him not even when the Lord raised him from the dead did He command, *"Sell that thou hast and give to the poor."* The paths of perfection are as manifold

in form and as one in principle as is our one great human nature. The shining company of the blessed ones, the saints made perfect, will be as various, as numberless, as the galaxy of stars.

The young man "*went away grieved, for he had great possessions.*" Did he come back again? or did he wither and perish, even in the enfolding embrace of Christ's love? We know nothing further about him; but it would be a hard philosophy which should easily reconcile itself to the idea that he made utter shipwreck of life. Joseph of Arimathea might have been such a man, and might have had such a history; but the whole tale might almost be a parable of the history of the Jewish people, save that it is so manifestly a graphic personal history. In them too was the passionate spiritual earnestness, the burning zeal of God, the native faculty for the most intense and heroic forms of the spiritual life. And they too "had great possessions;" high privileges, high pretensions, high expectations, and innate capacity too for gaining and holding worldly substance, which in them, as in this young man and as in the Scotch in the modern world, was found associated with spiritual qualities of the very highest grandeur and power. And they, we read, after many wanderings, many overthrows, many miseries, will be brought home to Christ. Let us hope too that this young Jewish ruler found rest.

But thou, young soul, full of high aspiration and heroic endeavour, if thou wouldst be perfect, look within. "Thy America is there or nowhere." Take

*"Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor."* 59

*thyself* in hand with that searching sternness of which the vision of the eye of God will be the inspiration. Set Christ, who pleased not Himself, before thee, and work that form of self-renunciation into thy every-day life. Battle like a chivalrous soldier with the base, mean, envious, grasping, lustful thoughts and imaginations which are ever prowling within the precincts of the temple which Thou hast to keep pure for the habitation of the Spirit. Be a pattern of high, pure, and noble living to all who come within the sphere of your light. Be brave to speak the truth, to do the right and to uphold it, to condemn the wrong and to overthrow it, in whatever forms you may meet with them, either in the outward or the inward world. Make your business name illustrious by integrity, your home life beautiful by love. Deny thyself, thy base bad self, and take thy cross, the cross of a purpose as high, as pure, as Christ's life can inspire in a human spirit, and then struggle bravely on. Life will grow heroic enough then, before Christ and before the angels. Thou too shalt be perfect. Thou shalt have treasure in heaven. Thou shalt follow the Lamb in the regeneration. And no crown shall shine more lustrous than thine, no form shall move with more heroic tread, in the great assembly and church of the first-born—the crowned victors of life's battle, the priests and kings of the heavenly hierarchy, the white-robed elders of eternity.

#### IV.

### GOD'S ELECT—THE ELECT NATION.

“God’s elect.”—Rom. viii. 33.

It is not so much a single misread passage, as a misinterpreted Scripture term, which I propose to consider in this and the following discourse. And let me say at once that I am not so vain as to suppose that I can clear up the mystery of this profound subject, which has exercised the ablest minds of Christendom in all ages; I can but offer some thoughts to my readers which may help to remove some difficulties in their minds, as they have in my own.

Why is it that when the words “God’s elect” drop from the lips of a theologian, they seem at once to suggest ideas of privation and exclusion; some great blessing made free to a few, which the mass of mankind are neither allowed nor intended to share? As it is constantly treated, election is a thoroughly selfish and privative doctrine. It is strange that somehow, within the very shrine of a religion which came to destroy the root of selfishness, a doctrine has established itself which is plainly selfish to the very heart’s core. And selfish doctrine is simply antichristian. There would be no lack of basis for the argument that those ideas

of God and of His government of which election as popularly understood must be regarded as the keystone, are the most mischievous form of antichrist in the Christian church. They are profoundly selfish in two ways: in the influence which they exert on men, and in the view which they present of the character and the ways of God. What is the idea, simply and broadly stated? It is, that God of His own free will, in the plenitude of His sovereign power, selects and ordains unto eternal life certain of the fallen and guilty human race; that is, ordains them to boundless and perfect blessedness. This ordinance is supposed to proceed in nowise on any distinguishing qualities in the individuals ordained; it is the sovereign act of God, having in view simply His own glory—which consideration for His own glory moves Him to leave a great multitude to perish in unending torments, it being equally within His power, by a simple fiat of His sovereign will, to save a single individual or the whole human world. Now I say that the broad feature patent on this view of the Divine action in election is selfishness. It nourishes a very terrible form of selfishness in those who accept it as an adequate exposition of the Divine mysteries; and, which is worse, it presents an essentially selfish view of the Divine character and methods; as though God could gain something for His own glory and be satisfied, at the cost of endless misery to millions of immortal souls, whom an electing decree would equally have saved. But while it is easy to stigmatize the popular view with the brand of a very

antichristian selfishness, we do not thereby dispose of the doctrine itself. Election, whatever it may mean, is a very plain doctrine of Scripture, and a very broad clear fact in Nature and in History. We shall consider what may be its truth and its force.

But I imagine that the discussion will by many be regarded as foreclosed by the reverence due to the Divine decrees. Men have got into the habit of accepting certain things as Divine decrees, and then they regard argument about them as impiety. "*His judgments,*" they say, "*are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out.*" The decrees, they say, belong to a sphere which man's intellect is powerless to penetrate; it must accept with unquestioning submission the revealed judgments of God. These are the standards by which, we are told, the intellect is to judge all other things, but which it is not competent to judge. There is much in this statement with which I should feel entire sympathy. Let me know God's decrees, and I joyfully accept them as my standards and rules of judgment. But I do not feel the same reverence for man's version of God's decrees. You tell me that I must accept without question this dark mystery, on whose front selfishness seems to me to be written as plainly as the lines on Belshazzar's palace wall, because it is plainly a Divine decree. But God seems to tell me something about Himself and His ways in words too simple and clear for misapprehension. "*God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son . . . that the world through him*

*might be saved.*" "*God is love.*" Here is a broad clear feature of His judgments which strikes me—a word which seems to come to me from His own lips. You deduce from certain statements in the Bible a view of God's judgments which seems to conflict with this utterly. Which am I to believe? Which am I to cling to? Your version of His decrees, or the word of love and mercy which falls from His own lips, and which He seals to me, lest I should mistake or mistrust it, with the blood of His well-beloved Son? But it may be answered, and with some fairness,—This is not my version of the Divine decrees, it is written plainly, as plainly as anything can be written, in the word of God; I do not invent it or compose it, I read it there: how readest thou? The challenge is a fair one. There is much in the Bible on this profound subject which it is difficult to reconcile with the fundamental ideas which the texts quoted above present to us; and we find the principle woven into the whole texture of the creation and of human history. I cannot hope to offer more than a contribution towards the reconciliation, by making plain some method of exposition which is in harmony with what we know from Divine lips of the character and the ways of God.

Let us consider, first, that something like election is a very prominent principle in all God's acts and ways. It looks out on us from every page of Scripture, it is the key to the order of nature and of human history. There are elect angels, elect stars, elect human races, elect human souls, elect tribes of animals,



elect flowers, fruits, and molecules of matter. Equality, uniformity, indifference of forms, powers, functions, appears nowhere: everywhere things and beings, with superior endowment to other things and beings; made to head them, and to sweep them along in the orbit of their motion by the attraction of the superior on the inferior spheres. "*One star differeth from another star in glory:*" some flash forth resplendent, the regal gems in the diadem of night, while some are scattered faint and dim like seed-pearls on her dusky robe. And the diversities are as real as they are apparent, they are in the things themselves: one star differeth from another, not in splendour only, but in power, in the space it fills in the universe, its rank in the hierarchy of the shining worlds. And it runs through the whole scale of the creation. There are things whose beauty of form or colour are a joy to all who look upon them; there are things whose foul obscene forms we shudder to touch. Some fair tribes spend a joyous life, sporting in the sunny air, and sipping all the sweets of the creation; while others shrink into foul dark dens of darkness, where they batten on corruption and scavenger decay.

When we rise to the human world, for we rise to man even from the stars, we see the same principle supreme. Elect races, of strong pith and nerve, of high endowment, stand forth in the sunlit circle of civilisation, and seem to claim the whole field as their own. All round are feeble, obscure, or brutish races, dragging on a dull existence, which it is hard to

include in some instances within any fair definition of a human life. No doubt the obscene beasts and birds, and the brutish human races, have their own dull pleasures and their appropriate functions. But, in comparison with them, it is hard to disconnect the idea of privilege—election to a nobler, freer, richer life—from the condition of the civilised and cultivated European, who has all the treasures of the creation and of society richly to enjoy. It seems to come to him by the ordination of a higher Hand. He and his kindred are called out of the great mass of the human congregation—whose condition we cannot help thinking of as lower and sadder—into the front rank, on to the high level, into the full shining of the sunlight, in which alone all the higher germs of faculty unfold themselves and ripen their fruits.

Trace it up into higher and more spiritual regions, and you will meet in Scripture and in history with an order of elect souls; men who are to the most favoured races what the most favoured races are to the mass; marked out for the high places, the easy masters of their fellows, the born teachers and captains of men. And that we may be in no sort of doubt as to how such men come to the front, and what is the significance of their lives, God in the Scripture unveils the mystery. The Bible reveals His ordaining hand. By no dull chance, by no natural selection, by no accidental superiority to their fellows, do these elect ones pass to the front and constitute themselves the aristocracy of the world. It is God who wills that they should be

there. He selects, calls, ordains, inspires, and crowns them. God deals with them on a principle which distinguishes them from the mass. They have opportunities which are denied to their fellows; they have knowledge which is denied to their fellows; they have power which is denied to their fellows. They are called into an inner circle of living light; great masses are left in the outer circle of deadly darkness, and God is the author of the one ordinance and of the other. "*He made known his word unto Jacob; his statutes and ordinances unto Israel,*" and to no nation beside. And the time came in His good pleasure for a higher and more awful revelation, which brought life and immortality to light, and constituted its children the heirs of eternal glory and bliss. And the Bible draws back the veil, and unfolds to us the Hand which ordained the path of its mission, and added the power which crowned it with success. God chose the people, the very household, from which its Founder was to be born. God selected and endowed the men who were to carry on its work. God led their steps into the paths which He had prepared for them. God chose the peoples unto whom they were to preach their gospel; while those who, receiving that gospel, became the sons of God and the heirs of glory, were conscious of an inward, Divine, overmastering influence, which made them partakers of the Divine life and all the benediction that might follow in its train. They knew that by an inward Divine operation they were made partakers of a joyous glorious life, of which they could

see no gleam in multitudes around them. It was natural, perhaps inevitable, that they should consider themselves children of an election which distinguished them by a Divine decree from their fellows in time and in eternity. But did it so distinguish them? That is the question which is raised by the term, "*God's elect.*" Was their calling the decisive and distinguishing inscription of their names in a book of privilege whose lines no hand but God's could trace, whose records, when traced by the Divine hand, no creature's hand could destroy?

Of course it would be easy to foreclose the whole discussion by the assertion that the notion of election is a mere delusion, a dream of the religious imagination, a fond human interpretation of a simple natural law that the strongest things struggle to the front rank while the weak ones fall to the rear. Modern science rather smiles at this notion of a disposing Hand. Things dispose themselves, some of its ablest teachers tell us; we have only to inquire how they dispose themselves, that we may fall in with the order; but why they dispose themselves, or to what end, we have absolutely no means of knowing, and our guesses only lead us astray. I am not seeking to argue this point now. I am addressing those who do believe in a disposing Hand; to whom the idea of God, and all which the Bible reveals about the mind and the heart of God, are as the living glow of sunlight in what would else be a dark sad Babel of misery and sin. To those who accept the light of the Bible about the

mystery of the ways of God, and who can understand what men meant in old time when they said they were "called," "moved," "ordained," "sealed," by the Holy Ghost, I address myself, conscious of the perplexities with which this doctrine is surrounded to earnest, simple, trusting hearts. But let me say in passing, to the former class, that the difficulty of the subject is not disposed of by a sneer at the Bible or the saints. Shut the Bible if you will, the same facts, the same order, meet you in Nature and in History. If you do not care to know anything about reasons, if the why and the how are questions wholly beyond your ken and care, if all which your godlike reason has to do in the universe is to observe facts and arrange them under laws, that you may walk wisely and safely through life, then that difficulty for you is over; to give place to a deeper difficulty, in which Auguste Comte lost himself at last, the difficulty of comprehending why we are thus "fearfully and wonderfully made." But if this "discourse of reason" in you moves you to look beyond the circle of that which is tangible by the senses and the understanding, and impels you to search for a reason as well as a law, then I say that the same problem which you refuse to study in Scripture affronts you in Nature and in History, and will urge you with its tormenting questions until you turn to the Bible again, and accept the solution from the lips of God.

But what does it mean, this election unto eternal life? It is stated distinctly in Scripture that certain of the human race are "God's elect;" and are what they

are in character, privilege, and destiny, in virtue of this sovereign ordaining will of God. The idea is constantly presented that the election is unto certain spiritual advantages, influences, and experiences, with the blessings for time and eternity which they carry in their train. The question is, must we regard this as personal and distinguishing, as regards the motive and method of the Divine action, intended to set a difference between one man and another now and for ever; or is it the conscious and visible outcome of a far wider movement of the Divine Spirit on humanity, necessarily personal and distinguishing to the eye of man's understanding, because the great unknown sphere of the Divine operation is veiled from sight? We have here to do with deep mysteries. The book of the decrees, of which so much is said, is a sealed book to all of us. The meaning of the word "life," unto which the elect are called and ordained, is too large for us to master. We know not what discipline, what varied experience, may await them, what states and stages they may be called to pass through, before the Divine counsel concerning them is fulfilled. But how far can we penetrate the mystery? Is there any help offered to us other than difficult and apparently conflicting doctrinal statements, whereby we may find our way more easily through the gloom?

We shall find, on studying the Bible, that in this matter too we have other light than doctrinal statements. We have the light of life to look to. The life of Christ is the truth of Christianity. So here God

has set before us in His word, writ large so that all may read it, the life of an elect people, from their birth-day to the day of their death. It is written with a fulness, with a completeness of revelation of the interior life of the people, which is unmatched in history. Let us see what it has to declare.

It will readily be conceded that we have in the call of this people Israel all the conditions of an election, such as the New Testament sets forth. There is the distinct absolute calling and separation of a people to peculiar privileges and prerogatives, for no foreseen virtue of their own, by the sovereign act of God. "*The Lord said unto Abraham, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee*" (Gen. xii. 1-3). Here is the foundation, the effectual calling of God, according to His sovereign and inscrutable will. The sovereignty of the act is brought out with still greater fulness as the development of the people proceeds. Paul employs it in Romans ix. 1-13 as the prerogative instance of election. They are distinctly reminded that their calling stood not on their own works but on the sovereign grace of God. "*Understand therefore that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness, for thou art a stiff-necked people*" (Deut. ix. 4-6). The warning is again and again renewed (Ezek. xxxvi. 22-32). Further, the promises are most explicit. The everlasting love is most clearly set forth (Isa. liv. 1-10). Here is the complete evidence of election; and the history of the

people amply sustained it. They alone among ancient peoples knew the Divine name (Deut. iv. 7, 8). They were led forth from the darkness and bondage of Egypt through a weary perilous wilderness to a beautiful and wealthy land, the garden of the oriental world (Deut. xi. 10-12, viii. 7-9). God led them forth and planted them there ; and He upheld them there against the banded forces of the world. The elect of God, they trod the path of that awful exodus with the sea walls on either hand, soon to burst in foaming floods on the hosts of their foes. God's elect, they traversed the wastes of that broad grand wilderness, with the solemn mountain peaks all round them, and the desert silences, out of which they heard the voice of the living God. God's elect, they passed dryshod through Jordan, crushed the powerful and gigantic Canaanitish peoples in many a tremendous battle, swept the country of its bestial inhabitants, and settled themselves as masters in the goodly land whose mountain ridge, like a diadem, fair Jerusalem crowned. God's elect, they held their mountain home against the forces of the world's most splendid and victorious empires, as secure, while they were faithful to their unseen Ruler, as the stars in their orbits or the constellations on their thrones. God's elect nation. Let us ask what light is shed on their election by their history.

They stand apart from all other nations. But in what respect do they stand apart? Mainly in the high strain of the life which they were called to live, the



exceeding sternness of the discipline they were called to submit to, the lofty quality of the work they were called to do. They were privileged to aim higher, work harder, and suffer more sharply than any other people in the world. "*He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel,*" said the seer as he gazed on their goodly and splendid array, and swept his vision over their far future. But is this the witness of their history? Is there any people on whom the yoke of the righteous law has pressed with such sternness; whose iniquities were sought out with such keen inquisition, whose rebellions were chastised by such tremendous strokes? God lifted them up and made them an example of His ways with men. Every feature of His character and ways,—His patience and tenderness, His truth and justice, His wrath and judgments,—they knew as no other people knew them, and to the end that they might make them known to the world. Their life as a people was one long, benign, and searching discipline, that they might be perfected as God's messengers and ministers to mankind. I hope to show this more fully in the next discourse. I hold that the aim and end of Israel's calling, from the first, was blessing to the nations from whom their calling seemed to separate them; "*I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing,*" is the idea which rules their history. The gentile world, far from being abandoned because Israel was elected, was under the training of a gracious Hand during all the ages of Israel's calling, and the welfare

of the great world is the consideration on which hangs the problem of Israel's destinies still. They were elect, but not unto themselves, or for the sake of their own future ; but rather for the sake of the work which their position of privilege would enable them to do for mankind. Their election simply brought them under a sterner pressure, to live a loftier life and fulfil a nobler destiny than the pagans who surrounded them. They rebelled against the pressure, they refused their vocation, they treated their election as a private advantage, and were taught the truth of election by the most tremendous chastisement which any nation has ever endured. For the world's sake they were called. They refused the ministry, and God made them an example of how much a nation which refuses its vocation and betrays its trust may endure. The suffering of this elect people in chastisement of their sins, their crowning sin, rebellion against the salvation of the world, is the darkest tragedy of human history. Again, again, again, the stroke fell on them ; still the hand was restrained in mercy, and the profitless vine, the vine that "*brought forth fruit unto itself*," was spared. But the blow fell at length with crushing severity, and for eighteen centuries the elect people have been the miserable victims and outcasts of the earth. And they are the elect people still, elect in a wider sphere of election ; and their experience through all the Christian ages has its explanation in the relation which they sustain and the ministry which they owe to mankind. It is a parable of the history of election through all

the ages. Election manifestly means something which involves high stern discipline, sharp judgments, and, it may be, terrible overthrows. And the aim and end of it all is the service of man. Elect to a great ministry, a noble leadership—to the front rank in the field, to the high place in the strain, to all that may purge a man of narrow, partial and selfish imaginations, and make him understand that “God’s elect” must catch the spirit of THE ELECT ONE, who came into this world *“not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”* To this topic I shall recur in the next discourse, in which I propose to consider the condition and calling of the elect soul.

## V.

### GOD'S ELECT—THE ELECT SOUL.

"God's elect."—Rom. viii. 33.

It will readily be conceded that the question of election would present an entirely different aspect, if any human eye had prevailed to look into the book of the Divine decrees. Were it clearly known that this man's name is written there, assured unto life eternal, while that man's is not written there, the whole problem of human life and destiny would be changed from the very foundations; questions of human truth, virtue, goodness, would pass into the background, and a fact external to man would, in that case, be the ruling planet in his house of life. And the conditions of the problem are not much altered, if the decree be written, though no human eye has seen it,—if it be settled in the inner chamber of the Divine counsels, with reference to no fact interior to man's life, whether a particular human spirit shall or shall not attain to life eternal. I fully recognise the truth that the popular view of election among the more moderate Calvinistic theologians does not formally involve the decree of reprobation; but seeing that it is firmly believed among them that only by the action of Divine grace can those

called be saved, and that the action of that grace in the called must be victorious, the line between non-election and formal reprobation, though real to the mind, is dim and unreal to the heart. The true question, the question of questions, for such a man is settled; and all interior states and experiences, all his inward hopes, fears, struggles, aspirations, joys, and pains, sink back into mere symptoms of the disease of life. The disease of life, I say, for in that case healthy vital action becomes impossible. If on the other hand I am told that though the Divine decree has settled it, yet God treats men, and suffers, nay encourages them, to treat their lives as though freedom were a reality, and the joys of heaven were a prize honestly within reach of all, then, in a way to my mind very awful, we make God a liar, a schemer, a trickster, and in that case something more than human morality goes to wreck.

But is it not in the Bible? Are there not a multitude of passages which speak of certain as the elect of God, as chosen, called, ordained, unto life? Most certainly, nothing can be plainer than such statements. And there are passages which speak as strongly of God's broad purpose that the world should be saved in Christ, His desire that none should perish, His pleading entreaty that all should come unto Him and live. There are passages in which He speaks with a tender pathetic solemnity of the alienation of man's will as the one cause of sorrow in the world; and we feel while we read them as if it would be an awful mockery

to suppose that God knew the while that He had power by a word to turn men, but would not. There are difficult and apparently conflicting statements in Scripture on this profound subject, arising from the fact that the whole sphere of it is beyond the grasp of our thought. The harmony of what seems discordant in this lower sphere of our knowledge we shall discover, when we know what the Life Eternal means on high. There are two ways of dealing with apparently inconsistent statements in the word of God. We may torture the words so as to modify their meaning, and make a consistency which comes within the grasp of the understanding ; or we may hold the truth which we gather from each of them, and let it exercise its full influence on our hearts and lives, while we are content to wait for the full understanding of the harmony, till we see all things more clearly in the sunlight of the eternal world. There are passages in the Bible which make the inheritance of heaven depend absolutely on the electing will and the upholding hand of God. There are passages on the other hand, which make it depend as absolutely on the deliberate choice, the strenuous resolution, and the persistent courage of the human soul. You may say that the difficulty is solved by believing that the electing will and the upholding hand work through the free choice and the earnest perseverance of the human. But this simply removes the difficulty a stage, unless election is abandoned. The electing will is still absolutely the efficient cause of salvation. It is really election in its most positive

form ; while there are passages which seem to declare that there are cases in which God distinctly wills, and man as distinctly will not. We must wait to understand it perfectly, and wait in faith. In faith, I say : I will explain what I mean. A man may say, Does the Bible give an uncertain sound ? does it say this thing and that thing, and leave us in a dilemma, uncertain of the truth ? Most surely not. If there are in Scripture doctrines stated, which appear to be discordant with each other, the mind of man, being in harmony with the mind of Him who gave the Bible, finds in itself a capacity to entertain them both. It cannot fully harmonize them, but there is something within it which assures it that a harmony is possible. It can draw at once comfort, strength, and hope from the various statements, and place itself by God's help in the way of discovering the complete harmony as its knowledge grows complete. It will live them both, so to speak, and discover the unity in time.

The doctrine of a personal election must in the very nature of things have a mystery in the heart of it. God's foresight, foreordering of the course of human affairs, and man's freedom, conflict with each other in a way which puzzles the understanding. The strict logical consequence of election is fatalism, and fatalism is but antinomianism stripped of its Christian dress. The tendency of high Calvinism to run practically into antinomianism is well understood. This is in all ages its easily besetting sin. But the life of the Spirit, the life into which we are led by the Spirit

of God, while conscious that God is its Fountain, realizes an inner freedom of choice and action, which it cannot fully explain in its harmony with the Divine activity. But the Spirit of life is wiser than our understandings; and if any man will do His will he shall know the truth, and many inscrutable things will become plain.

In the midst of the doubt and difficulty with which this subject is surrounded, we saw that some light might be gathered from Scripture history. The life of an elect people might help us to understand what the doctrine means. We found that God had called a particular people, and set them forth as an example of what He means by election. All the conditions of an election are realized in their history. Called and separated by sovereign choice, endowed with high and peculiar privileges, they were placed in a position of distinguished eminence as compared with the rest of mankind. For no virtue of their own, but for the glory of Jehovah's name, they were elected and sustained against the pressure of otherwise overwhelming foes. It was the sovereign will of God which from first to last was busy about their national life. And now what were the broad features of that life? Very stern discipline, very sharp chastisements, a high standard of national living, which they were to be trained to aim at and realize by a far more severe method of education than was applied to the culture of any other people in the world. But there was something in the purpose of their calling deeper than this.



Not only that they might be trained by that discipline to a very high form of national life were they elected, but also that their culture might be the national inheritance of mankind. I affirm that from first to last Israel's calling contemplated something outside the sphere of Israel's life. The honour bestowed on them, and the pains lavished on their culture, were God's ministry, or a very important feature of God's ministry, not to them only, but to the whole human world. Abraham was blessed that he might be made a blessing; and this remained the characteristic purpose of Israel's elect national life. Not at all for their own comfort and pride, not for heaven's pride and comfort in them, but for the sake of the life they were to quicken and the light they were to show to other peoples, God made them what they were, placed them where they stood, and made them the religious aristocracy of the world. Their election, if I may so express it, was like a great electric jar, in which converging streams of electric force were stored, not that they might remain there a private national possession, but that they might flash forth through a thousand conductors and quicken mankind.

In the earlier portion of the Old Testament there are hints of this, though, as one might expect, but dim. The first work of their Divine Ruler was to separate them, to disentangle them from the habits and influences of the pagans,—to isolate them, in fact, as men isolate the vessel with which I have compared them, that they might be the more fully continent of

the Divine light and fire. But when at length their nationality was consolidated, and their national consciousness was developed, so that they began to reflect on their own calling and destiny, then prophets interpreted to them more fully the meaning of their election. They were bidden to let their light and fire stream forth to the Gentiles; and in words of matchless force and splendour their career was pictured, as God's chief missionaries to the world. (Isa. lx.) They failed to grasp the significance of their position; they tried to "*bring forth fruit unto themselves.*" Then God shattered the vessel which so selfishly guarded its treasure; and, despite themselves, the healing quickening streams flowed forth, flowed round the world. But shattered as they were, their very fragments, as we learn from St. Paul, were full of promise to the Gentiles: "*For if the casting of them away be the reconciling of the world, what shall the recovery of them be but life from the dead?*" (Rom. xi. 11-15.)

But what of the gentile world which was abandoned while Israel was called and saved? A true reading of the Bible will, I think, convince us that it was distinctly not abandoned; that while the elect people were separated to their special culture, their high and noble life, the nations not elect were not forsaken. God, we are taught, had purposes of mercy to the whole world, the whole sum of the human, in this calling of the Jews to the knowledge of His name, and this leaving of the Gentiles "*to feel after God if haply they might find him.*" The gentile experiment

of life was quite as much in the track of the Divine education of humanity, as the lesson of life which God taught the Jews. The Grecian and the Roman culture, nay that of the great world empires which are pictured in the human image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, are very essential elements in the life of Christendom at this moment. And these results were wrought out by peoples not included in the visible election, but equally we are bound to believe, nay, we are distinctly taught to believe, under the guidance of the Divine hand. God had His eye on the great human mass, when He selected and separated a people to be called by His name and live to His praise; and His chief interest in that elect people, we gather from prophetic Scriptures, was the hope of which they were the children, that through them the great human world would be blessed, and gathered into the everlasting kingdom of the Lord.

And this is the key to the meaning of election everywhere. The fundamental principle, I should rather say the radical vital force, in all the higher developments of the spiritual life in man, is the movement of the Divine Spirit on the springs of our thought and will. "*You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins,*" is the testimony of Divine truth to every human spirit which in the higher sense lives. "*So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy,*" is the fact about the calling, the conversion, the purification of every regenerate human soul. And those in whom

this grace of life is working, who are baptized with the Spirit from on high, are most conscious of the presence of a Divine power within. "*Not I, but the grace of God which was with me,*" is the testimony of their own hearts about the deepest experiences and the most fruitful purposes of their lives. Does this mean that man is a many-voiced organ whose keys are touched by a Divine hand, which speaks with a thousand tones, but all of them modulations of the same breath; utterances of the same mind, though with infinite variety of time and tone—at bottom though a monologue, the one discourse of God? Most surely not. For these very regenerate souls, so conscious of the stirring of the Divine life within, most completely realize the free movement of the powers and passions of their own being; they know that they too choose, and love, and live in God, and are most profoundly convinced that on their own strenuous energy depends their entrance into the full possession of all to which God hath called them in His Son.

And this opens out the deepest truth of the subject, the reconciling truth, that all acts and states of the higher spiritual life are the fruit of a free union, a free blending and intermarriage of wills. The Divine life in the soul is that in which the Divine will and the human are one. Marriage, the marriage of souls, is the highest, the divinest ordinance of God in the sphere of this life. The perfect human unit is to be found in that home in which the two natures, the two wills, are one. But the love out of which this perfect

union springs is a mystery. How it springeth up no man knoweth. You cannot say simply that the man chooses. There must be some responsive condition in the woman's heart, having an independent will and responsibility of its own, which makes an effectual choice possible. So is it in the higher sphere. 'The perfect man, the man who fills out the form which was before the mind of the Father when He made man in His own image, is the man who is partaker of the Divine nature, in whom the human will is married to the Divine—the calling, the choice, having its masculine power in the higher, the heavenly will, but becoming effectual only in blending with that which is already in a certain responsive harmony with it; which is powerless without it, and powerful with it only through its abounding, kindling, quickening life.

But this question of election still remains partially unsolved. This call, does it reach all alike? This brooding light and glow, is it around all germs of higher things in human hearts? We are bound to believe it. We are bound to believe that the God who so loved the world as to give His life for it does not hide Himself from any human soul in that world, does not fail in some form to present to it the things which make for its life and peace.

But the differences which God puts between one and another in the way of advantage and opportunity raise very anxious questions in all earnest students of the Divine ways. There are some who are placed in the full blaze of the light, the full glow of the love,

on whom the word of eternal life is pressed with a directness and an energy which might almost force the entrance of unwilling hearts. And then this inward responsive attitude, what the Saviour calls the "honest and good heart," the being "of the truth," whence does it come? How much of it arises from outward or inward influences of which Heaven is the parent; and which seem to imply some discriminating care, interest, and love? But here we reach the unfathomable mystery of personal character and propensity, whose deep darkness is only effectually lit by the perfect love of God to each unit of the human race. But these considerations help us to understand how an elect community—that is, a community in whom the fruit of the Divine culture, the meeting of the Divine call with a responsive heart—manifests itself; and how it seems, to those who can only grasp that which they see, and who think that the unseen must be interpreted by contraries, to be an effectual calling and separation of an elect band, and an effectual rejection and abandonment of the rest.

But what is this calling unto life? Nothing is more misunderstood than this word, eternal life. Eternal to us too often means future—election to something which is to come as a reward after a lifetime of toil and tears. But "*this is life eternal*," says Christ, "*that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*" The elect are elect to live this life, which standeth in the knowledge of the eternal God; elect as Israel was elect to a very lofty

level of life, to a high strong strain of duty, to live like Him the symbol of whose life was the cross. They are the visible election, the men in whom, through the ordinance of God in the matter of advantages, opportunities, and influences, the call has become fully fruitful, and who consciously live the higher diviner life. Child of the election, take up thy cross and follow the Master; and in living His life, in confessing, "*I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me,*" make thy calling and thy election sure.

The apostolic epistles are full of "election." Why? Because the men to whom and of whom they were written were full of the life. The fact was patent. The election accounted for it. But it expressed nothing adverse concerning possible kindred facts which were not seen, which had not come forth into the clear daylight of visible manifest life. There were these men and women living purely in the midst of impurity, unselfishly in the midst of selfishness, nobly in the midst of baseness, honestly in the midst of knavery, truly in the midst of lies, joyfully in the midst of sadness, hopefully in the midst of despair. And every step of this life was won against overwhelming pressure, every point was gained by brave defiance of toils and dangers which would have affrighted any but the noblest and strongest spirits from the way. Men took their lives in their hands in those days, and were ready at any moment to fling

them down as worthless dross in comparison with truth, purity, and charity—the things by which spirits live. They, too, understood the meaning of the vocation which Judaism missed: “*Ye are the salt of the earth,*” was said of them; “*ye are the light of the world.*” They grasped the fact of their election as the Divine call to the noblest, the most strenuous, the most self sacrificing ministry which the world has ever known, or perhaps ever shall know while time endures. These men and women who clung to the belief in their election, asserted it in the haunts of vice and penury, in the dungeons of miserable captives, by the sick beds of ulcerated lepers, or in the huts of plague-stricken or life-weary slaves. They entered like a beam of heavenly light the dens of disease and misery, from which all ministry but theirs recoiled. No man wondered to hear them *say*, because all men felt, that it *was* divine. Elect light-bearers, elect teachers, elect nurses, elect physicians of souls and bodies, elect champions of right, elect adversaries of wrong, elect captains of progress, not afraid to lead the vanguard deeper into the realms of ignorance and night! God send us more of them! God multiply such a thousand fold! The world has no jealousy of such election. It would hail it joyfully as it did of old, if we had it in the pristine force among us still. Wonder not that such “saints” as these clung sternly to their election. Wonder not that it was to an elect host that the trumpet note rang from the apostle’s lips. It meant for them that God was with them



against a world which would else inevitably crush them; that God would uphold their lives and their ministry, till the world which hated and trampled them beneath its grinding heel should break forth in praises to the Lord.

Those to whom the apostle wrote found themselves, through a combination of inward disposition and outward advantage in which the disposal of a Divine hand was clear, in a position of singular honour and power looked at from one point of view, of singular pain and peril looked at from another. They intrenched themselves in the fact of their election to everlasting glory against the pain and the peril which beset them in their daily paths; and *their* election was always spreading its light and its savour; it was ever flashing its rays into the darkness, and wooing men to share the privilege and the joy. But we misunderstand the matter utterly if we suppose that this sphere of the election was the only sphere in which the Lord was working, though there His light most intensely shone, there His life most vividly glowed. We saw that of old, outside the pale of the elect race, God worked mightily, though inscrutably, to accomplish a merciful purpose for the whole human world. And so outside the pale of those who are visibly, consciously called to His kingdom, in whom the election is the fundamental fact in their spiritual history, there are operations of His Spirit in human souls everywhere, the relation of which to His kingdom will only be understood on high.

These elect ones are just the front rank in the army, those in whom the Divine call to the post of toil and peril has found an eager response; who feel themselves chosen for a great enterprise, but who know that it is the enterprise only which makes the election something better than a name. Men lolling idly on down beds of privilege,—as selfish, worldly, frivolous, heartless, as the mass of the men of the world around them,—claiming the title and using the name of the elect, rouse men to frenzy. There is nothing men hate more fiercely than a lofty claim unsustained by a gleam of power; a name of dignity and honour, alike unadorned and unjustified by the high qualities which win the homage and reverence of mankind. But the world suffers gladly men with a great name if they but use it greatly, if they make it a power of benediction to their fellows; it can make ready room for as many such as appear.

A Christian man, fully conscious of his standing ground, knows that he stands on a Divine election. He knows moreover that the root of that election is not a Divine decree but a Divine energy, the election standeth in the manifestation of a life. Far from feeling that his calling separates him from men to a life and a destiny apart from the great mass around him, he feels himself drawn more closely to their fellowship. He knows that the life which in him has wrought itself out to some clearness of manifestation, whereby he is designated as an elect soul, is the life which is working everywhere, seeking to fill all the springs and to

permeate all the channels of the great human world. He knows that his work, the very end of his calling, is to help forward its manifestation. He is to radiate it himself, and to cherish even the faintest glow of it which may redden the embers of any human heart. In a word, he is elect, not to leave men behind him as he advances to his perfection, but to bear men with him; even as the Prince of the Election, the First-born of all worlds, cried in the hour when the accomplishment of His eternal purpose drew nigh through death, "*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*" To draw the world to Christ is the mission of "the elect soul."

## VI.

### THE TRUE IDEA OF SUBSTITUTION.

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again.”—2 Cor. v. 14.

LITERALLY, “*if one died for all, then did all die;*” which presents substitution in a light somewhat different from the view which has very widely prevailed, and has wrought no little mischief in the church. The suffering of Christ *for us*, “*the just for the unjust*,” as having a substantial effect on our relations with God, our standing ground and our destiny, is a vital truth of the Christian revelation. It was not simply the suffering of sympathy and tenderness, the friend for the friend, the brother for the brother, which so wrought on the apostle’s spirit, and which has constituted the strongest motive power which has ever been brought to bear on the human heart. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” means something more, means infinitely more, than the grace of sympathy and self devotion. The grace of the Redeemer, who gave Himself “to be sin for us, knowing no sin,” is a grace of sacrifice; and he who sees no meaning or but poor meaning in the word sacrifice, as applied

to the work of the Lord Jesus, must miss the very core of the theological ideas of St. Paul. "*Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" expresses the source of that power which laid hold of man's nature in its degradation and despair, and lifted it up to aspiration, conflict, and hope. The love to Christ which that grace enkindled was the breath of a new life to a dying world. When that glow passed over it the dead world rose up and lived (Eph. iv. 31, v. 1, 2; 1 Pet. ii. 18-25, iv. 19). The man Christ Jesus by the power of His cross and passion has wielded from that cross the sceptre of a wider empire than ever monarch ruled from a throne. That power has entered at every point the sphere of the human, and has everywhere permeated and quickened it. Even the mightiest armies that have ever swept through Christendom have marched under that banner; man's holiest and most far reaching enterprises in politics, commerce, art, and industry have been truly a crusade. The love of the Lord Jesus has been the purest inspiration of the noblest and most powerful human spirits, and has been at the heart of every great movement which has contributed largely to the welfare and progress of mankind.

The apostle Paul found in it the one constraining motive of his life. It inspired the most intense, the most absorbing passion. It supplied the force and ruled the motion of the greatest and most fruitful life-work which one man's energy has ever accomplished in our world. Measure the work of the apostle

on his own time and on all time, add to it the life-work of the great host of apostolic spirits who in all ages have been willing to spend and to be spent in the Master's service, and you have still but a feeble measure of what this love of Christ has wrought for the great human world. Here the apostle expounds the constraining and the sustaining principle of his ministry, which could glory in infirmities, in necessities, in distresses, for Christ's sake, if Christ's soul might be the more fully satisfied with the fruit of His travail, and human souls might be saved. And the words refer rather to the love of Christ to man, than the love of man to Christ. As if, profounder than the passion of gratitude which Christ's great sacrifice can kindle in human spirits, was the desire, the hope, that a man might live and love like God. "*The love of Christ constraineth me;*" that is, the love of Christ to man, to me; it has mastered and possessed me, and filled me with a desire which fires every pure passion and strains every energy of my being, to live a life which may claim kindred with His life, and justify by power the name by which He has called me, a son of the living God.

It is perhaps the grandest revelation of the essential quality of man's nature, that the most powerful motive which can constrain him is drawn not from the pity, the love, the tenderness, but from the example of God. And it is the only motive to constant and consistent charity—not almsgiving, but that patience and long-suffering, that bearing of each other's burdens, which is the crown of the Christian life, more rarely worn

than of old in these modern days. Mere natural kindness may wear for a time the fair aspect of charity. Much that goes by the name of charity is merely the self-indulgence of a kindly mood. Many an one will grudge no effort to help a fellow creature, if the credit and gratitude are to be all his own. But, if some other is in a position to offer the same help with a higher advantage, he may watch the kindness ministered by that other with envy and even with hate. It is but a selfish satisfaction which in this case is sought after all; it will stand no test of disappointment and pain. If we are to bear long and still forbear, to forgive "until seventy times seven," and still strive and hope, we must catch the inspiration which sustained the apostle through his grand career of sacrifice and suffering, and do it because to do it will be to think and to act like God. If ever we are tempted to bemoan ourselves over the hardness, coldness, and ingratitude of mankind, and to abandon noble enterprises of love and mercy in despair, we have but to remember what God has borne, is bearing, with us and with all mankind. We shall cheerfully lift the burden again, and set our hands afresh to the work; toil as we may, suffer as we may, we can never toil or suffer like Him. There is that in the imitation of the Lord Jesus which satisfies the deepest wants and cravings of our nature, while it fulfils its loftiest aspirations. We know too that we are in the way of the blessed life when we are striving to think and to act like God.

The basis of this power is set forth in the words,

*"Christ died for all."* Perhaps there is no sentence which is felt to contain a larger meaning than this sentence of the apostle. These four brief words describe that which is most central in the history of the human race, perhaps in the history of the universe and of eternity. And yet there is no sentence to which it seems more difficult to attach a definite meaning. The true force of this proposition has been the fundamental topic of theological controversy since theology was constituted. There are three main ideas on which I propose to offer some remarks. I do not attach to them the names of any theological parties: nothing so ill describes a man as his theological party cry; he is mostly sure to be either much better or much worse than his creed. But these ideas tinge the thinking of religious minds very deeply; and I think that a clear view of them, if we can gain it, will help us to see our way through some at any rate of the theological confusions of our times. Two of them I should call extreme views on either side; that is, they fail on one side or on the other to take note of some essential conditions in the problem to be solved, and fail therefore fully to satisfy men's hearts. The third seems to me to take note of all the conditions of the problem, and to offer the truth on which the soul can rest.

1. A very large class of Christian thinkers—I use the word in a broad sense, comprehending all who take the life and the work of Christ to be the transcendent fact of history—would interpret the words



thus: Christ died the martyr of all; the witness of truth to all; the manifestation of the Father's love to all: and there the work finds its limits. Whatever a supreme love of truth, a supreme power of self devotion, can do to enlighten and to quicken men, Christ has done; but that is the limit of His work. We cannot understand, say these theologians, Christ dying for us in any other sense. Vicarious suffering, vicarious death, convey to us no meaning. If He died for us, it must be because He was true to principles which it was supremely important to man to understand and believe in, and was true to them even unto death, forcing them, as only a martyrdom can force truth, on the conviction of mankind. His death as the great martyr assured the triumph of His principles; He quickened them by His life-blood, and thenceforth they were living germs in the consciences of men. There are many who fail to grasp the truth about the incarnate Word—very God and very man, the Word "*who was with God,*" "*who was God*" made flesh; who regard Him with profound reverence as a Being apart from all other beings, as His life is alone in point of elevation and sublimity among human lives. They believe that He came from God as no other man comes, and that He declared the truth and the love of God as no other can declare it. The love of God to the world He revealed for all time, for all eternity; but with that the work was complete. It must wield what power it may over human hearts and kindle a responsive devotion; and in the sense

that it puts new hope into man's heart to know that the Father loves him as Christ makes him know it, and becomes the inspiration of a new endeavour, He may be said to quicken and to save the world. But any deeper meaning in "*Christ died for all*," any idea of vicarious sacrifice such as the creeds set forth, they cannot entertain; it offers nothing on which their belief can lay hold. They can get as far as Christ the martyr, Christ the pathetic and profound interpreter of the love of the great Father to the whole human race; but Paul, they say, hebraizes when he gets a stage beyond that, and speaks of the death of Christ as the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Believing profoundly as I do that Paul, instead of hebraizing, instead of speaking as a Hebrew thinker, distinctly humanizes,—that is, speaks as a man, taking note of some of the radical facts of man's nature and the more conspicuous elements in the problem of his life,—in touching these questions of sacrifice, atonement, propitiation, and mediation, this school seems to me to err from the truth by miserable defect in one way, as much as the school of which I am about to speak errs on the other.

There is no rest for man's spirit in a theology of which the central figure is the martyr—the simple witness for the truth and the love of God through the anguish and the shame of Calvary; or rather we should say the true witness must be something more than a witness. He who said, "*Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us*," knew not how little of the Father the mere

witness even of a martyr's death could reveal. The mystery of reconciliation is a mystery of sacrifice. He must be the sacrifice, who would declare the Father to the world. Witness to us is one thing; the hold of the Father upon us through the sacrifice of the Son is another. Christ our sacrifice is related to us, has a hold upon us, in a way which no power of witness explains; He is a power working in us rather than a word addressed to us, a renewing, assimilating, sanctifying power, the root of a new nature, a new life, a new destiny; and this is what man needs for rest. Christ by dying for him has made the love of God a regenerating, restoring principle within him; a Divine power, fed directly from the springs of the Divine life, has through Christ taken possession of his being; and this it is which makes the tale of Calvary a gospel, which constitutes "*the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*" the spring of a new life to a dying world.

2. The second view of the text which I here consider is that which presents the death of Christ in a purely vicarious light. Pure, naked substitution; all the pain, the shame, the death, the Lord's; all the joy, the honour, the life, ours as the gift of His love. There is a large and influential school of theologians who regard the death of Christ as the equivalent substitute for the death of the whole human race—a death which sin merited and justice decreed. They look at it thus: Man, though born from the hand of God with a nature prone to sin, "*going astray from the womb,*

*speaking lies,*" is yet as a free being, having power of will, responsible as a free agent before God for his transgression. He is created with a nature prone to evil,—it is confusion to say it is from Adam he gets it, God is the author of the law by which he inherits from Adam,—he is sinful in fact in the very tincture of his blood, so that a pure human being cannot in the nature of things exist except he be Divine, yet God holds him fully accountable for the evil which flows from him, treats him as criminal, and dooms him to death. Under this sentence of death the whole human race is lying. "*God cannot so much as look upon sin, neither can evil dwell in his presence.*" He must as a righteous ruler hate it, brand it, and punish it. The only punishment is death: "*the soul that sinneth it shall die,*" in the nature of things must die; it is the only possible end of sin in a world in which a righteous Ruler still holds the sceptre of government, and has the power to execute His decrees. For the evil that fills the world, and for which every man living in the world is in his measure responsible, the sentence of death lies on us all—death, the death of the body, the death of the soul.

But between man and the execution of that awful sentence, awful, for it would make the fairest and the freest world in the universe one great charnelhouse of death, the Lord Christ intervenes. All are dead, powerless to help themselves, powerless to save themselves, powerless to stay or even to protest against the sentence; but there is One on high who lives, whose

life transcends in value the whole sum of the life of the human world. He undertakes as a man, a man of infinite representative value, to die the death that every man is bound to die. His voluntary death for the doomed, the dead, atones by its infinite worth for their guilty transgression. God's righteous tribunal accepts the substitution, the Man for the men; and when the Lord "*laid on him the iniquity of us all,*" the sentence was remitted righteously to all who should fulfil the ordained condition and believe on Him to the salvation of their souls. This, according to these theologians, is the very marrow of the gospel. A life, of infinite worth, has been laid down instead of a number of lives of finite worth; and God, His justice satisfied by the penalty paid by man's Substitute, remits the sentence to all who "*believe on the name of the only begotten Son of God.*" This condition, under this system, is represented as a condition of mercy, faith securing for those who exercise it an entrance into a gracious school of discipline, wherein, being justified, they are sanctified that they may be finally glorified.

And this view of the matter seems nearer to the heart of the truth than the former; that is, it takes full note, whether satisfactorily or otherwise, of some of the most profound conditions of the problem, which the martyr theory wholly misses. In the first place, it lays hold with firm grasp on that fact of facts in man's experience, his sense of guilt. It may exaggerate, even to the point which would make God unrighteous

who taketh vengeance, the innate and utter depravity of man. But it lays hold on his sense of guilt; the sense that his sin is his own, his own work, his own burden, his own pain; that however he may argue the question of the constitution of his nature, a conscience within him tells him that freedom is a great fact, the fundamental fact in his nature, that sin is a constant and wilful abuse of that freedom, and that the true attitude of a human spirit before God is, with hand on mouth and mouth in dust, confessing, Unclean, unclean! Again, it takes note of man's sense of the need of sacrifice, of an atonement to be offered on his behalf to God. It may take gross and mercenary views of the nature and bearings of that atonement; but it believes in the thing—that a mind of God has to be expressed about sin which only the death for sin of the one sinless sharer of human weakness and human woe could express; that a homage has to be paid to a dishonoured law, which only one Being in the universe who could honour it by obedience could pay; that something has to be done on the part of man in his relations with God, which only one in human flesh could do, and which yet it was impossible in the nature of things that man could accomplish for himself. All these essential conditions of the problem are recognised in the view which I am now considering. But there is one thing wanting, and that is some key to the righteousness of the procedure—one being dying in another being's stead. Where is the rightness of this arrangement? Here are two

beings, the One pure and perfect, the other stained and doomed. The perfect One offers Himself to death; the doomed one, because the perfect One dies, is spared. Men fail to catch the morality of this arrangement. It seems even to have an immoral element in it: "*every soul shall bear his own burden,*" is surely a fundamental principle of the righteous rule of God. But here a sinless One suffers, a sinful one escapes; and however willing the sinless One may be to suffer, however His relation to the sinful ones may make it a right thing in many respects that He should suffer for them, yet this absolute sacrifice of the Sinless, this absolute immunity of the sinful in virtue of this vicarious suffering, seems to strike at the fundamental notion of justice in the matter, and has long been a grievous stumbling-block in the way of souls. This leads me to the consideration of the third idea, which a true rendering of the text expounds.

3. *If one died for all, then did all die.* This places the principle of substitution in a new light.

One died for all, not as a friend, not as an example, but as a sacrifice. "*He died the just for the unjust, to bring us to God.*" He offered something for man, which man in his own strength and from his own resources could not offer; He accomplished something for man by dying, which man by ten thousand deaths could not have accomplished for himself. He made by His voluntary death, by devoting Himself for a sin which He loathed, but which yet by oneness of nature with the sinner in a deep sense He shared, at

once a revelation and a confession of man's sin, far transcending in virtue and in power the confession which might be wrung by pain and fear from every guilty human heart. Nay, not transcending only; it is a thing by itself, this human confession of sin from the perfect human lips. That death for sin was a condemnation of sin before the great universe, which nothing else in the universe could utter; and it offered in dying a homage to the righteous Father which restores on a basis of righteousness the ruptured relations between man and God. We may regard the atonement as laying afresh and after a more awful fashion the foundations of righteousness, whereon to rest the edifice of the new creation. Pity there may be, mercy there may be, love there may be, without the atonement; but man's relations with God can only be restored on a basis of righteousness by the atonement; and a basis of righteousness, recognition of righteous conditions on all hands, alone can uphold the relations of God to the great human world through eternity.

But here again is the principle of substitution. One standing apart from us, having a distinct will and personality of His own, doing something for us by which our relations to God and the great universe are changed, and in virtue of which God can declare Himself reconciled to the whole human race. Unquestionably here is the principle of substitution: expunge it from the gospel, and you deny, you destroy, the gospel. If the whole work of Christ consists in



a witness or an influence, the "good hope through grace" becomes grievously weak and dim. The gospel surely lies in the assurance that something has by God's great mercy been accomplished for us by One who has the right and the power to act for us, which affords to us a new basis, a new standing ground in our effort and endeavour; which gives us a right to assume God's reconciled relation to us, and to feel that we have bestowed upon us by our Mediator a gift, an inheritance, which we can only by wilful refusal reject or destroy.

But where is the difference, it may be asked, between this view and the naked idea of substitution which we have already criticised, which we found mainly wanting herein, that it allowed the suffering of one being to stand for the suffering of another—allowed the burden to be lifted from the soul to which it belonged and laid on another, while the soul whose own the burden was became absolutely free from the load. The difference lies in the idea which the text expounds. The Lord suffered not so much as our substitute, but as our complete and efficient representative. He suffered as the head might be supposed to suffer for the members, each member in its measure bearing its appointed share of the burden and the pain. He suffered for us, not to release us from the necessity of suffering—which of us finds release?—but to change entirely, radically, the character of our suffering; to make it a suffering unto life and not unto death, suffering in the spirit of Christian patience,

patience with a great hope in the heart of it, and not in the spirit of despair. But from the suffering of life the Lord releases none of us; He even taught that the fruit of His mission might be to introduce a new and sharper suffering into the world.

The text assumes that Christ can place Himself in that relation to our nature, that all His action and passion must be attended by sympathetic action and passion in the members of that body of which He is the head. He does not stand apart only, doing something for us; He stands among us, in vital relation with us, doing something with an infinite power which repeats itself in finite forms in all who by faith realise this vital connection with Him. If He declares by His death the whole guilt, shame, and misery of our transgression, it is that we may learn to comprehend and confess it, that Christ in us may utter the whole burden of our shame and sorrow before God. A true Christian experience, one in which the meaning of "*Christ died for all*" comes out in all its fulness, will suffer for sin, will be ashamed of sin, will make bitter lamentation over sin, in a manner and a measure which has Christ's hatred of evil as its inspiration. He did not die to save us from sorrow for sin; far from it; He died rather to intensify our sorrow, while He lodged the belief in our hearts in the midst of our sorrow, that the suffering, sharp as it is, is not unto death but unto life. Did He die for us, for our sin? We are to die for our own sin, the death of the body, the death of the soul. We are none of us

released from the necessity of dying: we die bodily because we have sinned; and we "die daily" in spirit. The man who had entered most profoundly into Christ's experience, and who knew beyond other men what Christ's dying for all men implied, declared that "*we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake.*" Christ's death, His self devotion, His anguish, His endurance to the last extremity, the hiding of His Father's face, reproduce themselves in every true Christian experience; the Christian is the man who has learnt to live and to die most completely like the Lord (Rom. vi. 1-7).

You see the boldness of the apostle's metaphor, "*we are crucified with Christ.*" The whole shame and anguish of Calvary in our finite measure we are called to share. He suffers for us, that He may enable us to suffer with Him. That suffering, bitter, utter as it was, was not unto death but unto life. Death had no power over Him. Dying He triumphed; as He entered the prison house, He robbed death for ever of his spoils. He died for us in this sense, that without His dying, without the basis of our reconciliation which He laid by death, we must have remained for ever dead. "*When we were yet without strength Christ died for the ungodly.*" But He did not die to spare us the pain of dying, He died to make our death, in every gasp, every pang, vital and not fatal; an experience leading up into the realms of life, not down into the darkness of death for ever. "*If one died for all then did all die,*" that is, die the death to self and sin which

the Lord's death for them had rendered possible, the pangs of which, to the man who dares to be crucified with Christ, the cross and passion alone explain. Hence the "*I am crucified with Christ*" of the apostle; and the remarkable passage, "*that I may know him, the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection of the dead.*" And hence the conclusion of the text, "*he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again.*" He died that they which live might die daily to the sin to which He died, and dying to sin might live the life which He lives for evermore. His death was the triumphant act of life. He would make death to us too a victory, a coronation. Die we must; but death through Him becomes translation, translation to the sphere of life in which He lives for ever. His substitution is one which bears us with Him into the sphere both of His dying and His living; we die with Him unto sin, we live with Him unto God. The Christian life is that which accepts Him, not as the Substitute only, but as the Head, in whose deepest experience all the members are to share; which seeks to escape nothing which He endured, while it escapes through Him that which He could not endure—the death which is eternal.

## VII.

### THE TERROR OF THE LORD.

"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."—  
2 Cor. v. 11.

THIS text is constantly quoted to justify a mode of presenting and urging the gospel, which happily finds but little countenance from the custom of the apostles or of the Lord. We speak familiarly of the terrors of the future, the terrors of death, the terrors of judgment, the terrors of eternity; but the terror of to-day, the terror of this moment, we too constantly let slip. The popular interpretation, or rather misinterpretation, of this passage proceeds on the supposition that the apostle felt himself urged by the vision of the awful future which was before mankind, to preach more strenuously that gospel whereby they might be "delivered from the wrath to come." And this interpretation seems to imply that a very vivid presentation of these terrors, the terrors of death, judgment, and hell, must have been *an* important, if not the most important, element of his preaching; and hence the conclusion is drawn that a large infusion of the terrible must enter into an evangelic ministry which aspires to reproduce the spirit and the method of the ministry of St. Paul. I wonder how many terrible pictures of death and of hell,

how many graphic portraitures of a dreadful God, a God of vengeance and of doom, through all these ages of Christian preaching, have been inspired by the supposed meaning of these words.

But the meaning of the passage, rightly read, bears in a widely different direction. There is nothing here about the terror of God, in the dark sense of the word terror, and nothing about the awful future. "*Being conscious therefore of the fear of God, we persuade men.*" That is, we play no double, or doubtful, part in our ministry—both which, as we gather from the epistle, were charged upon the apostle by his calumniators; we act with single eye and honest heart; as men who have the eye of God upon them and the fear of God within them, we preach the gospel. The fear of God, the wholesome, honest fear which hath no torment of terror in it, that fear of God which I trust you take down with you to your daily tasks, and which has terror only for lies and lusts, is the fear of God of which the apostle speaks in the text.

We have no direct means of knowing the precise nature of the charges which were persistently and malignantly urged against the apostle, by the emissaries of a judaizing party who were alarmed by the boldness and freedom of his gospel. We can gather however with tolerable clearness from his pointed allusions to these charges in both epistles, and especially in the second, that his footsteps were tracked by teachers who set themselves deliberately to malign his character and to destroy his work. His motives were

assailed, his conduct in not making himself a charge to the Corinthian church was misrepresented; some change in his plans which he had made was ascribed to an unworthy motive, and he was studiously placed below the other apostles who had been the personal friends and companions of Christ, in authority and influence in the church. He answers these charges not without a touch of bitter sarcasm, and it is evident that his keenly sensitive heart was wounded by them to the very quick. But in this passage he appeals, as only a man of earnest integrity can appeal, to the Master under whose eye he was consciously working, and before whose judgment bar he was prepared to give an account of every action and every thought. Having the fear of the Lord before me, he said, I am free from all other fear, all other care. My heart is open to Him, my course is before Him. We are made manifest to God, and I trust also are made manifest to you. He said this in the just belief that the man who can look up to the eye of Christ, without shame, will in the end be able to commend himself to every honest human heart. This is the true and full bearing of the text.

The terror which it seems to express has been imported into it by our translators, and it has been kept there by the slavish apprehensions of the sin-stained human heart. Alas, we believe in terror so much more easily than we believe in mercy and in love. The elements of the terror are already stored up within us; for the mercy, the love, we have to look out of ourselves in faith and hope to God. Paul was

beyond the reach of any temptation to lie, to deceive, to play a false and selfish part in his ministry, because the fear of the Lord was upon him ; that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom, and which is the characteristic feature of the wisest, the noblest, the strongest, the most fearless, of the human race. When the apostle cried, "All ye that fear God, give audience," he was summoning, not the basest and most slavish, but the highest, the most truth loving, the most fearless, of his hearers to listen to his gospel. It is the fear which a child has of a wise, righteous and tender parent, and which has dread only of one thing—whatever might wound and grieve that parent's heart. There is no reason then, in any honest meaning of the text, to conclude that we must preach a gospel of terror, or mingle what we call the terror of the Lord, in any large measure, with our representations of the Divine character and ways, if we would follow in the steps of the apostolic ministry. And yet there is an element of terror of which the human spirit cannot divest itself, of which it is not well that, in its present condition of sinful weakness and compliance with temptation, it should endeavour to divest itself, and which must take its fair place in that declaration of the whole counsel of God, at which a gospel ministry should aim and by which alone it can accomplish its work.

There is a mode of presenting the gospel, with which I imagine most of my readers will be familiar, which makes a large use of the supposed terrors of



the unseen world; which largely and advisedly employs fear, the fear which hath torment, as a motive to godliness, and which would probably feel itself amply justified by the quotation of these very words. A considerable admixture of the terrors of judgment and of hell was held to be an essential condition of a faithful gospel ministry a few years ago; it was one of the notes most marked and prized. To a large extent the feeling obtains still. A man who does not present the terrors strongly is held to be an unfaithful shepherd; men say that he sounds the alarm feebly, and that the blood of souls lies at his door. The idea which lies at the root of this kind of ministry is—that the truly fearful things in man's path lie in the future; that for the present he may wander on easily and pleasantly in a path of sinful self-indulgence, but that one day he will awake to find himself confronted with very dreadful realities, of which till then he had never even dreamed. Here, it is held, he may walk in a vain show, self-deluded, with easy mind and conscience to the last; but then, when he passes through the veil, his delusion will be dissipated, and he will find that he has absolutely nothing before him but the bar of judgment and everlasting pain. Therefore frighten him thoroughly! Shout the alarm! Awaken him, arouse him, terrify him, overwhelm him with a sense of his danger, and lead him shivering and cowering to the shadow of the cross for safety and life.

This idea of the terror of the future as compared with the present arises very naturally out of that

wondrous faculty of self delusion which man manifests here—the easy blindness of his carnal heart to the things which make for his peace and his life. It is felt that this self delusion cannot last for ever; that these realities must some time force themselves on his spirit; and that therefore, in proportion to his present blindness and deadness, there must be for him a tremendous and terrible future in store. This may be quite true, and yet we may allow it to give a wrong keynote to our proclamation of the gospel. It would be hard, no doubt, to take too grave a view of this carnal blindness and carelessness of mankind. To rouse them from it, to awaken them to a sense of their state, must be, one would think, one of the chiefest aims of the preachers of the message of salvation. To shout an alarm, to paint the most vivid and terrible pictures of the awful future to which they are advancing, and thus frighten them into flight, as Lot fled from Sodom, is an easy and ready way of producing the desired result.

Nothing startles men like the sudden sense of danger; and such is the effect which preachers can produce by the startling and vivid presentation of all the terrible elements in a sinner's future, that we can hardly wonder that evangelical preachers deal in it largely, and find it one of the most powerful instruments at their disposal, for bringing souls, anxious and terror stricken, to the "*Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world.*" It has always played a distinguished part in eras of revival and reformation; except indeed

in the first great revival, which we shall find, if we study the discourses of our Lord and His apostles, was brought about by quite other, and I venture to think nobler, means. Men seeking to produce a deep and telling impression upon their fellow men have used freely this instrument, and knowing the terror of the Lord, as they understood it, have sought to persuade men that judgment is inexorably stern, that hell is horribly tormenting, that life is fearfully uncertain, and that at any moment the cry may be heard, "*the Judge standeth at the door*," to doom them to dwell hopeless with everlasting burnings.

And there can be no question that this presentation of truth has had a very powerful effect on mankind. The Roman church has adopted it deliberately, and has worked the engine of terror at full pressure. The mediæval church from an early age preceded her in the same path. There are no pictures of the torments of hell current in Protestant churches, comparable in vigour and intensity with those which the mediæval preachers, painters, and poets employed freely, to drive men by sheer terror to the salvation offered by the creeds and sacraments of the church. It may be doubted whether there are any images known to pagan religions, so full of ghastly and unutterable horror as those which have become familiar to the eyes of the disciples of a religion which declares that its God is love. They painted the picture of old in the very blackest and most awful colours, but then they believed firmly that they had absolutely in their own

hands the means of deliverance. They hold that the absolution from priestly lips, which the church was empowered to dispense, conferred absolute security against the terrors; therefore they did not scruple to paint them in the most hideous forms and colours, for if they could but frighten men to the priest they believed firmly that they frightened them to salvation.

The Protestant church has kept the terror but renounced the keys. It adopts the Roman view of the terrors of judgment and hell fire, in which naked horror predominates; but it claims no power of releasing man on the easy terms prescribed by the priesthood of Rome. The awakening Protestant preachers, who wield what they would regard as the true terrors of the Lord, seek to drive men, not to the priest, but to Christ. And thus a kind of dread of Christ, as the Being who really wields these terrors, has grown up in the heart of Christendom, which has sought to soften itself in the Roman church by Mariolatry, the worship of motherly tenderness; while in Protestant churches men are trying to emancipate themselves by denying the terrors of judgment and of hell altogether, and making the one cardinal article of their theology the infinite pity and the abounding mercy of the Lord.

But is there nothing fearful in life, in death, in eternity, which may fairly be described as a terror of the Lord, a terror which the Lord has put there, and which may be wisely wielded by Christian preachers as a means of arresting, awakening, and converting souls? Much surely; much that is most fearful. But

the terror is not *there* but *here*, not *then* but *now*; every day is a day of judgment which writes its records against the last great day; every sin fruits in suffering which here and now is an antepast of hell. There is quite enough which is fearful in the nature and the possible future of an immortal human soul, to make the boldest tremble. "*Who is sufficient for these things*" was the question, not of the weakest, but of the strongest and bravest man of his time. But it is demoralising to teach men to slight the solemnities of the present, that they may tremble before the possibilities of the future. To stand in awe of life, of a present God, of the present capabilities of an immortal spirit, is purifying and elevating. To lose the sense of the solemnity of the present in realising the terrors of the future, to act to-day, not because something is now, but because something will be then, is base and slavish; that kind of fear is a fear which hath torment, and has never done anything else than weaken and impoverish life.

It is a solemn thing to live, with a human will, with a selfish sensual nature, pressed by the temptations of a world like this; solemn, nay awful, to the man who has no higher hand to lean upon, no light from on high to guide his steps, no hope reaching beyond the veil to nerve and inspire his heart. Every moment there are influences pressing upon him which tend to make existence a burden and life a curse to him, as long as thought or feeling endure. And his own power is utter impotence. The wonderful passage, Romans vii. 7-25, which the reader will do well to study in this

connection, utters the wail of man's heart over the tremendous evils which threaten him, and the miserable weakness and helplessness which leave him to be their prey. But it is here and now that the burden has to be borne, the pain has to be felt, the deliverance has to be realised. Here and now the Deliverer is waiting to save; "*now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation*"—salvation, not from a possible future, but from an actual present: a present burden, a present pain, a present despair.

The grand aim of the preacher of the gospel must be to awaken men to a present sense of the misery of sin, and the anguish of alienation from God. The man who is conscious of that in his heart of hearts is in a wholesome, hopeful condition. This is the only "anxious inquiry" which it is wise and right to foster, How shall I get rid of the sin which is perverting, corrupting, destroying my nature, is poisoning all the springs of life, and sowing seed which will bear a bitter harvest of death in time and through eternity? That fear of the "wrath to come," which some preachers, justifying themselves partly from this passage, endeavour to awaken, which they consider a hopeful state of mind with regard to the life eternal, I call deliberately a base and slavish sentiment, compared with the sense of the solemnity of life, of every moment, which Christ and His apostles sought to impress on men. And I call it thus for this reason: it is at bottom essentially a fear of pain and not a fear of sin. The sin is here, the pain is there. Men are very care-

less about the sin here, but very frightened at the prospect of the pain there. This may have some deterrent effect, no doubt, on sinners, as the terrors of the lash have had upon garotters: but there is nothing purifying about it, nothing elevating, nothing in the deepest sense converting. It is mere dread of suffering, than which nothing can be in any high sense less saving to the soul.

If it is sin that a man is afraid of, it is here, close by him, close as the word that saves, "in his mouth and in his heart;" now, this moment, is the time to cry and to work for deliverance. To pass over the sin which is now degrading and destroying the being, and to tremble before the vision of the thongs of the Furies who will scourge the condemned soul through eternity, is to be the slave and not the servant of the unseen powers,—a poor, cowering, cringing, selfish seeker after safety, instead of a free, manly, earnest, upright, heaven regarding seeker of holiness and truth. Selfish, I say, for it is selfish to the very heart's core. Personal safety, immunity from pain, enjoyment of pleasure, are the uppermost thoughts in the hearts of those who have been trained sedulously in this theology; and this is a main reason, I imagine, that in theological circles manliness has become so emasculate, and mean, petty, selfish, sensual men abound. Preach the terror of the Lord: but understand what is truly terrible; not pain, but evil; not hell, but the sin that earns it; not death, but that deadness of heart which the love of the world engenders, and which

numbs the soul to the play of the Divine light around it, and the glow of the Divine love.

And this was emphatically the character of the preaching of the apostles and of the Lord. The element of terror is there, but it is kept remarkably in the background. Learn to live, was their message, and then you will know how to die. All their exhortations point to a salvation which was present. "Save yourselves from this untoward generation;" "save yourselves from the evil world;" save yourselves from the sin that is within and around you, and let a healthy future grow out of a renovated present—this is the burden of the message which they delivered to mankind. Terror there was; there must be a measure of it in all true preaching in such a careless slumberous world as this. Some men can apparently be reached no otherwise. Slumbering on the edge of a pit, and slipping, slipping, on to the very verge, he who would save them must cry aloud and not spare the terror. Anything to awaken, to arouse a perishing man. But do not imagine that there is anything healing or purifying in it. You have just arrested him by terror, and compelled his attention; that is all. Alas for him, alas for you, if you have no nobler, diviner gospel to preach to him; if you cannot make him feel that sin here and now is draining away his very life springs, robbing him of all the higher joys of his being, degrading him, discrowning him, and burying his manhood for ever in the dust. If, as the preachers of this awakening school seem to



imagine, he can be kept right only by the constant repetition of the alarm, then let them understand that it is with drams of hell instead of bread of heaven that they are feeding him; they may have saved him from the pit of lust or folly, to plunge him in the profounder pit of selfish, slavish care for safety, and dread of pain.

I have said that this gospel of terror plays a very important part in evangelic revivals in these modern days. It was a very powerful instrument of excitement and impression in the great evangelic movement a century ago. The preachers of the gospel had to deal with a deeply degraded and brutalised population—such a population as, I fear, is only to be found in a Christian country, such a population as could hardly have been found anywhere about the civilised world in the days when the apostles preached unto the Gentiles all the words of this life. They dealt in strong stimulating doctrines, and terror was an important element in their apparatus of influence. They produced a very profound impression; they renovated from the very foundations our English society. I believe that it was mainly due to these men and to their work, to the Methodist and other Nonconformist churches which they founded, to the kindred movement in the Church of England of which they were the parents, together with the Sunday-school and other congenial activities which sprang out of it and attended its progress, that England was saved from the horrors of a French Revolution eighty years ago. All honour to those

men and to their work. Cast in rough times, they used strong, rough instruments; and they wrought in our land a marvellous reformation. But it is quite open to question how far the gospel of terror in which they dealt so largely is the real cause of that unmanliness, that selfishness, that littleness of thought and life, which have been the shame of our theological circles and our "religious world" for the last half century. We have horrified men; we have driven them by terrors to "*flee from the wrath to come*," and to make salvation, or rather safety, (salvation means soundness, health,) the great concern of life. And we have at this moment, as the result, a religious life singularly destitute of those noble, grand, and powerful features of unselfishness and elevation above the world, which marked the converts of the apostolic gospel, and which command in all ages the homage and the reverence of mankind.

I am far from denying the power of this preaching to arrest, to convince, and apparently to convert men. My complaint of it is that it is a cheap and easy method, ready to hand, very impressive for the moment, but producing, in comparison with nobler methods, poor, base, and transitory results. I feel so deeply dissatisfied with the general tone of the religious life of our times, that I am led to urge the question, Are not we paying the penalty for that gospel of fear and of selfishness, thinly disguised, which we have been too long preaching to the world? Is it not time to try what the gospel of the love of God which is

in Christ Jesus our Lord, the gospel which saves, not from wrath, but from sin, selfishness, degradation, misery of mind and heart, will do for us and for mankind? There is fear enough in that, if we but know how to use it. But it is a fear purged of its slavish, tormenting elements. It is the dread of a daily service of the devil and rejection of the Lord, a daily wounding of Christ; a daily grieving of the heart of the merciful Father; a daily unmanning ourselves, unfitting ourselves for noble work and suffering in this life, for noble joy and glory in eternity. Having this fear before us we persuade men. *Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation. *Now* let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thought, and let him turn unto the Lord, for He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon him.

## VIII.

### ST. PAUL AND ST. JAMES. THE PAULINE DOCTRINE.

"Ye see then how by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."—JAS. ii. 24.

THE church has always entertained an uneasy feeling that there was a grievous inconsistency, if not a decided opposition, between the doctrinal views of St. James and St. Paul on this central truth. Paul asserts or seems to assert in the most explicit terms, he iterates and reiterates it, that Abraham was justified by faith and not by works. His argument in the second verse of the fourth chapter of the Romans fully written out is this:—"If Abraham were justified by works, he had whereof to glory before God; but he had not whereof to glory before God, therefore he was not justified by works." James on the other hand declares as explicitly that Abraham was justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar.

Stronger contradiction in terms than this it is hardly possible to imagine, and it has been a source of grave perplexity to theologians in all ages of the Christian church. Luther, in his strong rough way, finding the contradiction to the Pauline doctrine of justification apparently absolute, called it "a right strawy" epistle as compared with those of St. Peter and

St. Paul, and was for excluding it from the canon. The truth is that Luther, who was saturated with the spirit of the teaching of the great apostle of the Gentiles, found his idea of justification by faith, or rather the gospel idea which he so earnestly enforced, as mighty a weapon against Roman indulgences as Paul had found it against the "enslaving" and "beggarly" legality of the Jews. So pressed was he with the stress of the battle against Rome, in which justification by faith was the very key of his position, that he could not bear to find even an apparent contradiction of it in the canonical Scriptures; so he uttered this sharp and trenchant judgment on St. James's doctrine, which was two years before the world before it was recalled.

A fair consideration however of this passage of St. James will reveal that there is literally not a shadow of inconsistency between his doctrine and that of the Pauline epistles, but rather entire, beautiful, and even wonderful harmony—a harmony more complete probably than James himself realised when he wrote these words. It may be permitted to us to question whether the whole bearing of the Pauline doctrine was fully grasped by the head of the mother church at Jerusalem, who seems from many indications to have been much troubled in spirit by many of the words and works of the apostle of the Gentiles: St. Peter probably was not without qualms on the same subject. We know how difficult it was for him to receive into his mind and heart the idea of the all-inclusive

character of the Divine kingdom. The noble thoroughness with which he yielded himself to it when it had once been revealed, and which the eleventh chapter of the Acts unfolds, is equally conspicuous. But there was that subsequently in his conduct on a most critical occasion (Gal. ii. 11-15) which shows against what prejudices the idea had to win its way, and with how much of the old judaic leaven it was still mingled in his heart. And in his second epistle—in which he writes, “*even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction*”—his language reveals an uneasy feeling, not probably about the doctrine of the apostle of the Gentiles, as about the language in which he had set it forth. It is not to be supposed that the apostles understood each other perfectly. We read their writings and see a unity which it cost them much mental conflict, many doubts, fears, and misapprehensions to arrive at, and whose thoroughness after all they very imperfectly understood. Men of but limited range of thought and culture, like St. James or St. Peter, would inevitably find much that was perplexing in the profound and far reaching ideas of the great preacher and teacher, whose labours were more abundant than those of the whole apostolic band; and who alone among apostolic men was qualified by the range of his know-

ledge, the vigour and grasp of his intellect, and his catholic sympathy, to plant the church in the heart of the civilisation and culture of the Roman world. In the very nature of things it was inevitable that there should be much in his ideas and language which would honestly perplex his apostolic brethren. Many a time as they heard the reports of his preaching and his labours, they must have "doubted of them whereunto this would grow." Nay, we need not go back to the apostolic days; there are ideas of St. Paul, about the observance of days for instance (Rom. xiv. 5, 6), which the church has not fairly digested yet.

The last visit of St. Paul to Jerusalem must, I imagine, have been a profoundly sad one. It is evident that he advanced towards Jerusalem with a strong conviction that a great crisis in his history was at hand (Acts xx. 22-24, xxi. 13). If there was any man in the whole world who ought to have been welcomed with open arms by the church of the then metropolis of Christianity, it was the man who had fulfilled in his own person the vocation of the Jewish people, and realised the most glowing pictures of their prophets by calling the Gentiles into the kingdom of the Lord. Instead of acclamations, distrust and coldness greeted him. He met James and the elders, and told the tale of his missionary labours and successes. They, as they were bound to do, glorified the Lord, but passed on at once to the thing which was uppermost in their hearts. "*Thou seest brother how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law;*

*and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs."* Whether they believed the charge or not is not here recorded, but the language is that of suspicion and fear; and the suggestion which they made, that Paul should comply visibly with some Jewish ceremonial customs in the temple, as a sign of his fealty to the traditions of the fathers, must have seemed a somewhat pitiful one to his free spirit and large, loving, faithful heart. To be distrusted by those who ought to have been his chief vindicators was sad enough to a man of the apostle's keenly sympathetic nature; to have to go through an outward and trivial ceremony after all those years of effort to get men to grasp at the realities which were behind the ceremonies, was sadder still. We may be sure that he addressed himself with little heart to the test which the Jerusalem church was eager to impose on him. Perhaps we may recognise something of the patience and gentleness which age had brought to the apostle's proud and imperious spirit, in his willingness to submit to it. But he must have had a prevision of the ending of it. It satisfied the Jerusalem Christians, but it was the means of delivering the apostle into the hands of the Roman authorities, and it really sealed his doom. In all these events James, if not a mover, was at any rate assistant. He had no doubt in his inmost heart of the apostle's loyalty to Christ, and the substantial truth of his doctrine. And he was too faithful to Christ himself to



be other than joyful in the abundant labours and the abundant successes which had filled the whole Roman world with the sound of the gospel. But still we can see that his mind was in trouble about him. *We* have the whole of Paul's epistles before us, at any rate with but slight exceptions. We are able to criticise and compare words and phrases, and to weigh the exact force of the apostle's language. It was otherwise in the apostolic days, as we are bound to remember in justice to these Jerusalem Christians. They were dependent in large measure on reports of the apostle's teaching, and we can easily imagine how the report of certain sentences, no doubt exaggerated by the reporters, and stripped of all qualifying and explanatory clauses, might well have filled these narrow minded and timid believers with distress and alarm. Had they heard Paul's gospel they would have recognised it as Christ's. Hearing of it only, they were tempted to distrust it, with the kind of dread which the evangelical party cherishes towards the men who are not afraid of free thought, free inquiry, and free speech, at the present day. It is not so much their Christianity which is suspected as the possible tendency of their opinions, and their influence on the future development of the church.

It is quite open to us, I think, to suppose that the peculiar broadness with which the writer of this epistle asserts his view of the ground of Abraham's justification was suggested by what he might consider incautious or partial statements on the great subject of justification by St. Paul. The apostles and leading men of the

church did not always see eye to eye with regard to matters of moment, though they were one in spirit, and under all their diverse modes of viewing and stating it had hold of the same essential truth. The judaic element in the missive of the church at Jerusalem (Acts xv. 23-29), adopted at a meeting of the church which is foolishly called the first council, won we may be sure no respect or sympathy from St. Paul. It was adopted as a compromise between conflicting views and demands, and having served its temporary purpose was quietly laid aside. Paul's argument on the very point in 1 Corinthians viii. 1-13 shows plainly how little he felt it binding on his conscience, or on the consciences of those to whom he preached the gospel. The conduct of St. Peter again, in a matter of very critical importance, he not only dissented from but strongly and openly rebuked (Gal. ii. 11). There were evidently diversities of thought among these fathers of the church, and on some points they but partially understood each other; though it is wonderful how perfectly underneath it all they understood the Lord. This may seem a paradox, but it repeats itself in the experience of every age. Church parties happily understand Christ better than they understand each other; and under their diverse views and statements of great truths they have in common a vital hold on those great truths, which makes them members of the same living body, and will bring them to see eye to eye as well as heart to heart at last. So these men were one, in a measure of which they were not fully conscious. When we look at their

doctrine in its wholeness under all the diversities of thought and statement, we find a wonderful substantial unity, which is among the most significant of signs to us that they "*spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*"

1. The first step which will help us towards the discovery of the precise bearing of these words of St. James will be the study of the position of St. Paul.

St. Paul holds that Abraham was justified by faith. St. James seems to assert as distinctly that Abraham was justified by works. Let us inquire what St. Paul precisely means. "*What shall we then say that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*" (Rom. iv. 1-5.)

The first question which occurs is, How far is this in harmony with the teaching of the Old Testament Scripture? Take such a passage as this, for instance: "*and the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us.*" (Deut. vi. 24, 25.)

How is this statement, and in various forms this idea is constantly presented in the Pentateuch, to be reconciled with St. Paul's idea that "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight"? The difficulty arises out of the false notion of the legal dispensation which is current, especially in Protestant evangelical churches, which is due very much to a misapprehension of the real bearing of the language of St. Paul; and partly also to the fact that these terms whose import we are now considering have been made the battle cries of theological war. Paul's denunciation of legalism respects the law as man had marred it. The delight of Moses, and David, and the Psalmists, in the law, respects the institution as God had constituted it, in entire spiritual harmony with the gospel which in time was to grow out of it, and which was promised as its fruit, through the fulfilment of the purpose of which all its ideas and ceremonial were prophetic, and for which it was intended to educate mankind.

The relation of the law to the gospel in St. Paul's epistles is frequently treated as one of contrast, and especially where he is arguing with Jews or Judaizers, who made the law as God gave it of none effect by their tradition. The true relation must be one of harmony, as they are both of God and in their root Divine. The aim of God, in all His intercourse with and work for the people under the old dispensation, was not to constrain their obedience so much as to win their love. The thing they did in their sacrifice and cere-

monial in itself was really nothing; the loving obedience of the heart was everything. In a thousand ways God pleads with and appeals to them, unfolds to them His love, His care, His bounty, His tenderness, His hope. "*My son, give me thine heart,*" is His language from the first chapter of the Pentateuch to the last; and all the legal ceremonial observances which were enjoined, and which had aims of culture wholly beyond the apprehension of the people, derived their entire value from the loving trust of which they were the expression, and emptied of which they were withered boughs of a sapless trunk, meet only for the flame. "*Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us*" (Eph. iv. 32, v. 1, 2) will perhaps be regarded as a profoundly gospel exhortation, bringing the love of Christ to bear very directly as a motive power on men's hearts. Is not the passage in Deuteronomy, commanding generous consideration for the poor on this ground—"Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee; therefore I command thee this thing to-day" (Deut. xv. 12-15)—precisely in the same key? And what were the works, the very works which God had appointed, when love had died out of them? Hear how Isaiah spurns them in the name of God: "*To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. I am full*

*of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts ; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. Bring no more vain oblations : incense is an abomination unto me ; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies I cannot away with ; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.”* (Isa. i. 11-13.)

Very striking too is the language of Hezekiah on ceremonial order. Hezekiah was a man, who like all earnest though weak reformers in an age of decay, would be likely to magnify the importance of such points, and yet he said, “*The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.*” (2 Chron. xxx. 18, 19.)

It is like the order of a home where love reigns and inspires every act of obedience. The order is precious in itself, and precious for ends beyond itself. But infinitely more precious are the looks and tones of tender trust and love, which light up the daily life of obedience, and which fill the heart with the only true satisfaction which a spirit can taste, the fellowship of trust, sympathy, and love. But you can imagine that in a home a child may be conscious of alienation ; an evil spirit has entered in, and has marred the concord of the household. There is a stern resolutism of disobedience in the child's heart. There is one thing which he will not do or will not give up at the parent's command. Some pride, some passion within, rises up in rebellion. And you may imagine further, that while

there is this inward alienation, the child may be studious of all outward observances. He may be watchful to fulfil all formal duties, but without a word or look of frank tenderness, of loving confidence; no message from eye to eye, from lip to lip, from heart to heart. Yet there may be little outwardly for the parent to complain of; only a heart wronged and wounded, and robbed of the chief treasure—love. What are all the works in such a case? The parent may get very heart-weary of them, even tormented by them because of their admirable completeness, because of the parade of perfect obedience, which mocks the yearning of the heart for love. The parent may even break forth into stern indignant rebuke of the very obedience; as Paul and the prophets, in God's name, broke forth against the Jews. This is precisely what the law had come to in Paul's days—deeds, deeds, deeds; no life, no love.

Nor does the matter end there. Love only can inspire a true obedience. Let the love die down, and the obedience will gradually relax its character and strain; the weightier and nobler elements of the obedience will be forgotten, and the formal acts, which make no demand on the higher nature, will occupy all the thought. And so in every legal life, in which the love, which is the vital light and glow, has been suffered to grow cold and dim, it will end as it ended with the Pharisees in "*the tithing of mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and the passing over of the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and the love of God.*"

Moral corruption riots at will under the cloak of a legal obedience; and a great nation, observing the mere form of the commandment, becomes easily a mass of rottenness and pollution. "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. . . . Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.*" (Matt. xxiii. 25-27.)

This was the legalism which had utterly supplanted in Paul's days that love of the law, that delight in it, which are so conspicuous in the writings of Moses, David, and the Psalmists, and which continued unimpaired in the elect few, as the 119th Psalm reveals to us, down to a very late period of the history. "*Oh how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*" (Ps. cxix. *passim*.) The root of such utterances as these was a deep delight and joy in God.

Paul preached that faith was the one acceptable thing with God; that the deeds of the law were nothing, that faith was all. We are not called here to consider what is termed the scheme of the gospel which is proposed as the object of faith to man. For Paul maintains strenuously the identity of the faith which saves in all ages of the world. He, or the Pauline



man who wrote the treatise called the Epistle to the Hebrews, spends much effort and eloquence on the manifestation of that oneness of spirit which links the believers Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and David, with the believers in the Christ of the gospel dispensation. They believed, as far as they apprehended, with the same believing heart which moves us to accept joyfully the larger, fuller revelation of Himself, which God has given to us in His Son. The principle is one. And faith represents precisely that loving trust, that personal delight in God, which was the animating principle in men's hearts in the best days of the legal dispensation, and is equally the animating principle of all which leads to man's acceptance with God under the gospel. The act of faith is the restoration of a living, loving, personal relation between the living God and the living soul. Faith works by love; it restores the child to the Father, the Father to the child. What was St. Paul's faith in Christ? It was the distinct conscious termination of the struggle to resist Him, to kick against the pricks, which had long been raging in his heart. Faith is the renunciation of this inward alienation, which poisons all the life of obedience by killing all the love; it is the yielding of the soul to an attraction which establishes an entire sympathy of heart and spirit with the parent; it is the restoration of a lost trust, a lost love. This is in the very essence of *faith*.

St. Paul's doctrine is that Christ alone, such a manifestation of God as is afforded to us in the redemptive

work of His Son, could kindle its pure flame and nourish it in human hearts. Something the law had done towards it. What it had done was real and in the true key, as far as it reached. But the law, and all that God had done under the law, could carry man but a little way. The system could nourish but imperfectly the life of God which the Spirit kindled in the hearts of men. But "*what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*" (Rom. viii. 3, 4.) But that is not the point here. Faith, however it may be generated, is the living communion of the spirit with the Father of spirits, it is the loving, trustful glance or word of which we have spoken, and which the father, the friend, supremely values. Without it all acts of obedience are worthless and may become even hateful; with it all acts of obedience are beautiful and winning—the flower with its dewy fragrance, the fruit with its purple bloom, a joy to man, a joy to God. Therefore we too conclude "*that a man is justified by faith without the works of the law*"—faith in God the Redeemer, who alone satisfies the deepest cravings of man's spirit, kindles all its hope, and strains to the full tension all its power. The harmony between this doctrine and that of St. James will be the theme of the next discourse.

## IX.

### ST. PAUL AND ST. JAMES. THE HARMONY.

"Ye see then how by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."—JAS. ii. 24.

IN the last discourse I endeavoured to indicate in brief the leading principle of St. Paul's doctrine concerning the faith which justifies. We confined our consideration to the nature of the faith itself, without entering upon the discussion of the work of Christ as set forth in the gospel which, apprehended by faith, is the ground of our justification; and which is the complete unfolding of that counsel of God concerning the redemption of humanity, whose rudiments may be discerned through the symbolism and the literature of the law. We saw how strenuously the apostle contends for the unity of faith in all ages. He holds that the faith by which Abel, Enoch, Abraham, and Moses were justified before God, was essentially one in principle and in power with the faith which moved him to count not his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. His faith embraced a fuller, clearer revelation than was vouchsafed to Abraham; the light of the knowledge of the glory of

God in the face of Jesus Christ shone upon his path. But it was essentially the same light which shone round Abraham, when that horror of great darkness had fallen on him (Gen. xv. 12-18), and when the Lord in flaming fire passed before him, and established with him His covenant, wherein it was recognised that "faith was counted to Abraham for righteousness."

We glanced at the essential unity of the legal and the gospel dispensations, in that the law, equally with the gospel, claims and constrains the living trust rather than the formal obedience of mankind. We saw how through all the ages of the elder dispensation the Jewish people were constantly warned that their Divine Ruler cared nothing for their legal observances as such, nay might even hate and loathe them, if they were severed from the loving trust in Him as their living Lord and Saviour, which alone lent to them beauty and conferred on them worth. We traced the progress of the declension which ended at last in the entire alienation of the heart of the people from the God of their fathers, while at the same time they maintained a devoted observance of the ritual elements of the commandment; tithing mint and rue and all manner of herbs with conspicuous exactitude, but passing by the weightier matters of the law, which demanded, not observance only, but trust and love. We saw how the conception of faith which was set forth by St. Paul, and which forms the keynote of his teaching, involved in its very essence the revival, the restoration of that living trust and love which had

died out of the heart of the people. This love, which the influences of the law could but feebly nourish, was kindled to an intense glowing vitality by the great truth of the gospel, "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*"

Having considered in the first place the Pauline doctrine, we note—

II. That the doctrine of grace in the Hebrew churches seems to have fallen into precisely the same state of collapse which of old had overtaken the spiritual obedience which was demanded by the law.

Faith had evidently come to be, not a life, but a mere formula of life. Men professed to be justified by faith, to believe the truths of the gospel dispensation, and to observe the regulations of the church, while keeping their hearts as far from God as the veriest legalists under the law. It is quite as easy to make faith, that is the doctrine and discipline of the gospel, a form, as the doctrine and discipline of the law. Under the gospel a system of church ordinances and institutions grew up, as under the legal dispensation. Visible fellowship with the church had its conditions and duties, and visible fellowship became a kind of seal of salvation, in days in which world and church were in such fell antagonism. The Christian creed, of which more than rudiments are to be found in the epistles, would supply the place of the ten commandments; the acts of Christian worship would take the place of the temple service; the customary

offerings, for customs would soon establish themselves even in charity, and the due visitation of the sick and the poor would supplant "the tithing of mint and of rue," into which the glorious vital activities developed by the legal dispensation (of which Exodus xxxv. gives us a noble instance) had degenerated at last. Read the second and the fifth chapters of this epistle, and see what faith had come to, if not in the church at Jerusalem, yet in kindred churches, at any rate among many of the wealthiest and most influential members, in the days in which St. James felt stirred to write these words—  
*"But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which ye are called? . . . Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries which shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered. . . . Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and become wanton."* (Jas. ii. 6, 7; v. 1-6.)

It is difficult to suppose that the church at Jerusalem was wholly guiltless of these evil dispositions and deeds, which characterised the churches of which it would be regarded as the metropolis. There was probably a very strong community of moral conditions and tendencies among the churches of "the dis-

persion ;” though we can hardly imagine that such characters as those described in the fifth chapter would have been tolerated in the church at Jerusalem under the vigorous rule of St. James. But the special evils denounced in the epistle are such as would be likely to spring up in churches of Hebrew origin, and of Hebrew temper, among such as were still zealous of the law. One cannot but be struck with the family likeness of these Hebrew-Christian to the Pharisaic vices and failings. The epistle seems to picture the perpetuation of the Pharisaic school in the Christian church. Yet these men were nominally at any rate believers. They were the children of the new covenant, in the same sense in which the formalists to whom Isaiah addressed his stern rebukes were children of the old. They held the truths of Christianity, they believed the facts. They accepted the gospel of the resurrection. They attended the ordinances of Christian worship; they repeated the formularies; they performed all the customary offices of Christian charity and ministry in the church. Probably they professed themselves with peculiar unction believers in the gospel; they confessed themselves sinners perhaps with a special emphasis; they declared that they rested on the atonement, and were saved by grace alone. We know well the round of orthodox evangelical statements which Christian formalists can utter with apparent fervour, as glibly and idly as the Jew repeated his confession, or the Mussulman gabbles his pious reflections, which he keeps on hand for every

occasion, bringing Allah on to the stage in every trifling emergency of life. And yet this is the life which many of them were living. "*Ye lust and have not : ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain : ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?*" (Jas. iv. 2-4.)

And the mass of them must have been tinged with this spirit, or they had never tolerated its manifestation in the church. The old vice had broken out again. The law became an idol under the elder dispensation, and robbed God of the living, loving homage of human hearts : the doctrine and discipline of the church had become an idol under the new dispensation, and with precisely the same results. The formulæ of faith had taken the place of the legal commandments, and "believers in Christ" had come to mean just as much or just as little as did "children of Abraham" under the law. All life, all love, had died out of faith ; all that had made the acts and deeds of the Christian life beautiful had vanished ; and the word faith had become as nauseous to heaven on the lips of these judaic believers, as the word sacrifice had become in Isaiah's days. So St. James, seeing the utter deadness of heart of which faith had become the vestment, lifts the cloak, and in these stern trenchant words reveals the foulness and corruption that were beneath.

And St. Paul to the same people in the same con-



dition might have written well-nigh in the same words. The old vice of the Jerusalem Jews was working there still. When they turned to Christianity they brought with them a moral dulness and deadness, which robbed it of its chief power over their hearts. It was not without deep purpose that our Lord selected His disciples from Galilee; some living love to the Lord God of their fathers still lingered in those rude unsophisticated natures. They were less zealous of the law than the Jews of Jerusalem, but more open to the gospel. And it is surely the characteristic tendencies of the old orthodox party whose stronghold was Jerusalem, which tinge the judaic believers to whom St. James directs his epistle. It is more in the key of our Lord's discourse against the Pharisees than anything else in the writings of the apostles. It is aimed at the same party substantially, and the same sins.

In truth, nothing is more hopeless than the revival of an utterly corrupt and worn out people. They may seem quickened for the moment, but the old taint seems to lurk in the blood, and poisons all the new-born life. It was not in the corrupt and worn out Empire—to trace the working of the same principle on a larger theatre—that Christianity was to win its richest and most permanent triumphs. The fresh, young, pure-blooded German races alone afforded a fair field for the quickening energy of the gospel. The new wine, which had burst the old bottles—there can be no doubt that the pressure of the new Christian spirit strained the effete institutions of the Empire, and

hastened its dissolution—being put in the new strong vessels of Teutonic nationality, both were preserved.

The case in these Hebrew churches was precisely parallel to that which St. Paul pictures in the epistle to the Romans, as characteristic of the unregenerate Jew of his time: "*Thou therefore that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest that a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?*" (Rom. ii. 21–23.)

And St. James rebukes it in the same key, and almost in the same terms, as St. Paul. The Christian gloss makes absolutely no difference. If an idol is to take the place of the Lord, it matters little whether it wears the Christian dress; though there is a sense in which it matters much, inasmuch as the Christian trappings may give it but the stronger hold of human hearts. "Faith" as an idol of the mind, a means of hiding the soul from God, of sinking the Divine life into the likeness of a dull and heartless formalism, burying the only living thing in the world which offered to the world the faintest hope of escaping the pit of death, would have been no more venerable and beautiful in the eyes of St. Paul than in those of St. James. He might not have used precisely the same words; doubtless he would not; but he would have uttered the same truth with the same intense vehemence, realising

even more fully than his brother apostle the worth of that which was vital in Christianity to the world which was dying around.

III. We are now in a position to trace the essential harmony between the ideas of St. James and those of St. Paul on justification. They use the same terms ; "faith," "works." But that faith of which St. James writes so scornfully corresponds in the Christian sphere to the legal spirit of which St. Paul writes as scornfully in his epistles ; it is in fact the same thing in a Christian dress. While the "works" of which St. James writes so glowingly, and which he makes the means of justification, are really the overt acts of faith, the works into which faith must bloom, the fruits which it must bear, if there is any life in it ; and they correspond thus to the "fruits of the Spirit" of which St. Paul writes as glowingly, and "*which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.*"

The "work" of Abraham in offering up his son was the reason of his acceptance ; or rather it was recognised as the culminating act of that faith which had already been counted unto him for righteousness. "*And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself I have sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore ; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in thy seed shall*

*all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice* (Gen. xxii. 15-18). It was the "work" on which the eye of God rested with joy and benediction. Because thou hast *done* this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, blessing I will bless thee. But it was the living spirit of loving obedience which inspired the work which God accepted, and accounted unto Abraham for righteousness. The work itself was nothing—nay, it was not even suffered to complete itself. If Abraham had offered a hundred kindred sacrifices in the spirit of legal compliance with a formal commandment, the work would have been hateful; it would have been but a sacrifice of Moloch; and sterner rebukes than those in the fiftieth psalm would have conveyed to Abraham the righteous indignation of heaven.

And here I must turn aside from the straight course of my argument, to express my conviction that it is in these human sacrifices of the pagans, and the spirit which suggested them, that we must find the key to this otherwise most strange and terrible narrative. "*Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul,*" is a thought which has haunted the human soul in all ages, and has embodied itself in dark deeds of cruelty and misery. The thought which was haunting the pagan mind could not be absent from the mind of Abraham. We know not from what dark, terrible thoughts God was delivering His friend, when He accepted the sacrifice in spirit and spared the child—verily the twice born son. But in

this spirit which was in Abraham—the trust in the Divine word, in the far seeing providence of God, in His power and will to fulfil the promise of blessing, even through the death of the child of promise—the work was already perfect before God, being as yet unaccomplished. And thus St. James speaks of his *having* offered up his son upon the altar, though the angel stayed his sacrificial hand.

Nothing can establish more clearly than this language that the real “work” on which St. James was fixing his mind was the faith, the faith moving Abraham to obedience, which St. Paul makes the ground of his justification. Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness, says St. Paul. “Abraham offered up his son upon the altar, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness,” says St. James. But when you come to look at it you see that it was in faith only that he offered him. The only work there was the faith—a loving believing purpose, a submission of his mind to the Divine mind, which is simply faith in the language of St. Paul. And thus the harmony of the two doctrines is complete.

Hence St. James goes on to argue: “*Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works when she had received the*

*messengers, and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*" Paul would have said amen to every word. Faith, if it moves to no overt act, if it bears no fruit of submission and love, simply is not, in the judgment of the apostle of the Gentiles. Faith completes itself in life, as spirit completes and manifests itself in body. You mean precisely the same thing in speaking of men, whether you say every body or every soul. Faith without works is dead, being alone. Paul writes to those who were in danger of despising faith. James writes to those who were in sore danger of despising works, and of destroying the root out of which alone a life of loving beautiful deeds and ministries can spring. The one dwells on the necessity of the soul having a body, the other insists on the necessity of the body having a soul. But they both agree in the belief that the complete man is an embodied spirit; and both would say amen to the parallel statement in the theological sphere, "*As the body without the spirit is dead, even so faith without works is dead also.*" But St. James, when pushed to accurate definition, would hold equally with St. Paul, that works correspond to the body, faith to the spirit. He speaks in ver. 22 of faith "working" as the energetic principle; works as the body which it energizes and inspires. Hence the sharp retort in ver. 18, the full force of which, through the obscurity of our translation, is constantly missed. St. James is arguing against the man who magnifies the mere word

"faith" as the formula of life. He supposes such a man to answer, "*Why, thou hast faith ; thou art a believer, and art bound to magnify faith as much as myself.*" Yes, answers St. James, in the name of the true believer, "*And I have works : show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.*"

The doctrine of St. James, fixing attention on the body of a believing life as well as on the inspiring soul, is much needed in these Protestant and evangelical days. The mere formularies of faith we too have exalted and magnified, as did the Hebrew Christians to whom this epistle was written. A sermon plentifully adorned with the name of Christ we call a gospel sermon, no matter what spirit it may be of. An experience which makes abject confession of sin, of self-distrust, of faith in the Saviour, we call a Christian experience, no matter how much that is ignoble, selfish, worldly, uncharitable, may be mingled with it, and may make itself conspicuous enough in the life. We have almost given up the attempt to discern spirits, or we could never bear so much that is little, mean, base, selfish, envious, and malicious, in the assemblies, the discussions, and the literature of the church. Gross sensual sins we denounce and keep down ; but sins of spirit, an evil, selfish, worldly mind, which are quite as hateful, perhaps more hateful, in the eye of heaven, we tolerate in a measure which must fill heaven with sorrow, as it fills the world with scorn. We have inherited from Luther our horror of the doctrine of works, which he, in a very kindred condition of things

to that in which the apostle lived, inherited from St. Paul. Christendom, at the commencement of the sixteenth century, exactly reproduced that picture of Judaism, which, in the 23rd chapter of St. Matthew, is painted with such terrible vividness by our Lord. The first thing to be done, the one thing to be done, was to awaken it, to quicken it, to stir the dead bones with the tingling and thrilling of a new life. Hence the vehemence with which both Paul and Luther preach the gospel of faith in Christ, and contend that "a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." But in our loyalty to the great Reformation doctrines we have contracted almost a dread of noble, beautiful works of charity and devotion, lest they should become snares; lest, as we say, souls should build on them, rather than on the one foundation which alone can uphold the destinies of a human spirit in time and in eternity. The grand complete acts of charity and self sacrifice, which were common throughout the middle age, rarely gladden our sight in these days; and it may help us a little, to open St. James, and to see how "*faith wrought with works, and by works was faith made perfect.*" And let us understand that, in giving our ear to either apostle, we are giving it to both. There is, there can be, no schism in the seamless vesture, the apostolic teaching. The aim of these men is one, their spirit is one, their word is one, even as the Spirit who inspired them is One, the God which worketh all in all.



[NOTE.—It will be seen that in the foregoing argument I have assumed the later rather than the earlier date which has been suggested for the epistle. It is a much vexed question. Very solid reasons may be urged for the earlier date, and very eminent names support them. There is force in the remark, that if the epistle were later than the date of the meeting at Jerusalem, recorded in the 15th chapter of the Acts, the absence of reference to it and its decisions would be very difficult to account for. But nothing is more unreliable than this argument from omissions. Besides, it cuts both ways. If this were the state of the Hebrew churches at that time, it would be difficult to understand why there is no reference to it in the writings of St. Paul. The moral argument, and it is very much a matter of moral argument, seems to press very strongly to the conclusion that such a state of things as is here pictured could hardly have established itself so early in the history of the church. But be this as it may, my argument is not affected. If St. James had not seen the epistle to the Galatians when he wrote this epistle, at any rate the report of St. Paul's preaching must have reached him. The discussion which was terminated in the meeting at Jerusalem had been long in progress. It was but the culmination of the controversy which is recorded there. St. James knew perfectly, by report at any rate, St. Paul's doctrine; and it is difficult to escape the conclusion which I have developed in the introduction to these discourses.]

## X.

### EATING AND DRINKING UNWORTHILY.

“ Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. . . . For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.”—1 Cor. xi. 27-29.

I VENTURE to think that this is one of the most unhappy mistranslations in the whole of the New Testament. I know of no misreading of Scripture which has cost more loss of service to the Christian church, and more anguish of doubt and dread to human souls. A short survey of the condition of the apostolic church will help us to understand the true bearing of the apostle's words.

After a brief prelude of lofty purity, of heavenly faith, patience, and charity, the churches planted by the apostles sank to a very human level, and began to fight their way through gross superstitions, abuses, and sins. We meet with a similar state of things in the earlier records of Judaism. Eden lasted but for a span in the history of humanity at large, and it lasted but little longer in the history of the Jewish and the Christian church. We speak of the church of the apostolic age as a kind of paradisaic ecclesiastical state, all purity, peace, and love; no dishonouring

follies, no destructive passions, no disfiguring lusts. We dream of it as the temple of the Holy Ghost, pure as earth when the eye of the Maker rested on its first beauty and splendour, and the benediction dropped on the young world, "Behold it is very good." A perusal of the apostolic epistles will speedily dissipate the delusion. No doubt there was a brief period of wonderful wisdom, purity, and power, the record of which may be read in the earliest chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. But it was brief as the splendour of an April dawn. The clouds were soon stealing up in the sky. Nothing would be more startling to us, could we fairly realise it, than a vision of the actual life of this Corinthian church. We should find splendid virtues, great wealth of spiritual power, and intense, glowing life ; but mixed with them in strange combination, childish follies, glaring abuses, and even daring sins.

It is no new history, this rapid degeneration of the spiritual. Jacob as compared with Abraham presents in the old world a very fair image of the contrast of the apostolic churches with the apostles and the little primitive company at Jerusalem over which they ruled. The household of Jacob, to the eye of the understanding, presents in many respects a strange picture of a household of faith. From Abraham to Jacob was in truth a great fall. The seed which had been planted by God in the heart of that patriarchal family, and which had been nurtured by Abraham's faith, was destined to pass through trials and temptations, arising

from the lusts, the passions, and the superstitions of this world, in the household of Jacob and his descendants. It was to purify them by slow imperceptible stages, enlarging in ways not always visible the sphere of its influence among them, nourishing its strength the while from the higher springs, till at last it should break forth and fill the world.

From Christ and the Christlike company which the apostles gathered round them, there is a still greater fall. The spirit which dwelt in the apostolic company, as in a pure and perfect shrine, had to enter into the world and to struggle with its corruption. As the church widened its borders, it lost inevitably something of its first fresh beauty and power. The purifying of the moral mass of sickness and corruption into which the spirit of the apostolic church entered was not accomplished in a moment. We find in the early church—that is, the church of the later part of the Acts of the Apostles and of the epistles—the phenomena which constantly present themselves in the early youth of individuals, and which reveal themselves very strongly in the early patriarchal history. There are two classes of phenomena side by side, strongly marked and apparently inconsistent with each other. On the one hand there is intense spiritual vitality, capable when excited of the most transcendent efforts and sacrifices; and then on the other there are very dark, foolish, and even foul manifestations of the gentile leaven, the lusts, passions, and superstitions of the carnal mind, which sometimes seemed to rise up in

fierce insurrection, and to threaten the whole body with destruction. Perhaps, to go back again to the Old Testament for parallels, the figure of David as he really lived and moved on the stage of life, his greatness and his littleness, his profound fear of God and his passionate and daring sins, would be about as startling to modern evangelical professors of the straitest school of correctness, if they could fairly apprehend it, as would an apostolic church, in the whole manifestation of its life, seem to those who look back fondly to the days of the apostles as the paradisaic age of the Christian world.

I have dwelt on this point that it may be apparent to my readers, that it was by no means the eminent in spiritual attainments, the crowned victors in the battle, but very tried, tempted, imperfect, and easily ensnared men and women, whom, because of the faith which was in them struggling against the evils, the apostles gathered into the fellowship of the church. That we may understand this more perfectly, let us consider—

I. The disciples—the condition of membership in the apostolic church.

The saints of whom and to whom the apostles wrote were those who professed a desire to learn of Christ and to be taught the way of His truth. The terms of communion did not demand an extensive or profound experience, high attainment in Christian virtue, or model lives. It was just one thing, a vital thing, and simple as is every act of life, which was demanded—some good thing in the heart towards God and

towards His Christ. The intercourse between Philip and the eunuch of Candace is full of the deepest instruction from this point of view. On the first turning of his heart towards Christ, the first expression of a desire for a fuller knowledge of the glorious truth which Philip had expounded, he was recognised as a fit subject to be received by baptism into the church of the Lord Jesus (Acts viii. 26-28). But it soon began to be thought that Philip had dealt quite too easily with the eunuch; the terms of communion were made formally at any rate more severe, as the priesthood realised that they had the power of the keys, and so the 37th verse,—“*and Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest (be baptized). And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God,*” was interpolated, for that it is an interpolation no one recognised as a critical authority now ventures to doubt. That good thing in the heart, that attraction of soul to Christ and to His gospel, they took gladly into the church, that they might there shield it, train it, and nurture it to maturity. Our modern theory of the terms of membership, at least that which prevails in Independent churches, proceeds too much on the idea that some great thing has to be accomplished, and built up as it were into a firm and visible fabric, before there can be valid evidence of fitness for the fellowship of the church. We do not believe in germs and cherish them; we must wait until the flower has bloomed and the fruit is formed, patent to every gaze. We are prone to regard membership

rather as a seal of much that has passed, the sign of a certain state of assurance and advanced experience to which the disciple has attained, than of a desire to enter the school of Christ, and to learn more perfectly the way of truth.

At the same time it must be recognised that the altered circumstances of our time, as compared with the apostolic, render the matter by no means so simple as it was in those early days. Every convert to Christianity made his profession in the face of opposing influences of the most formidable magnitude and force, and in a sense took his life in his hand when he joined himself to the disciples of the Lord. There was therefore the very strongest guarantee that the confession of faith in Christ, and the desire for instruction in Christian doctrine and exercise in Christian discipline, were from a spiritual root. The temptations to a hypocritical profession were but slight in the age of persecution, when every faithful disciple might expect to end his Christian race by winning the martyr's crown and palm. Now, the temptations, if not to hypocritical yet at any rate to slight and careless confession, are abundant; and against the vain professions which spring from this altered condition of things, preachers have to warn and pastors have to guard their flocks. Still the truth abides unchanged, unchanging. It is the disciple, the learner, those whose hearts are turning to Christ with confidence and hope, those who are setting their faces heavenwards, and are girding themselves

for battle with the world and with self, whom we have to welcome to the fold of Christ, and receive to the visible fellowship of the church.

And the fear which constantly haunts such, and haunts the minds of experienced Christians about them, lest the discipleship should turn out to be a delusion and a mistake, is foolish and faithless. It is the way to make it a delusion, and to kill all its promise. Young things thrive best in the sunlight. Young germs of graces develop themselves best in the warm atmosphere of hope and love. This atmosphere of distrust with which we are prone to surround them, in what we consider our zeal for the purity of the church, is like bringing them into darkness out of the sunlight. It is shutting them up in the gloomy atmosphere of our own doubts, fears, and infirmities. We might be sure that if they are not strong enough to grow rooted in Christ's broad seed field, in the open air and the sunlight of heaven, it will not help them to plant them in our little, dark, dank, walled up garden, under the enervating breath of our cautious hope and our distrustful love.

The subject is no doubt a difficult and delicate one. We are bound to keep the standard high, the aim pure. It would be easy to quote passage after passage to show what grievous imperfections and impurities had developed themselves in the Corinthian church, apparently with toleration, until the apostle brought his sharp surgery to bear, and cut the evil to the quick. But if we were to argue from this that such corruptions are



to be anticipated, as in the natural course of things, and that nothing short of apostolic insight could be expected to deal with them effectually, it would be a fearful mistake; it would misinterpret the whole aim of the apostolic teaching, and frustrate the great hope which Christianity kindled in the world. "*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*" (1 Cor. vi. 9-11.)

But even among those whom he thus recognised, such a state of things had come to exist as he pictures in the context. "*For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. . . . When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What! have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not?*" (1 Cor. xi. 18-22.)

And it was regarded apparently as a matter of course. It existed unrebuked, unchastised, save by the chastisements of heaven whose meaning Paul expounds (1 Cor. xi. 30). The disciples verily were learners then,

and had much to learn. They were gathered into the fellowship of the church, when their learning was beginning, and not when it was ending; and the purpose of the Christian fellowship was to shield the young germs from the blighting, worldly atmosphere, and to stimulate their growth by the light and the glow of more fully developed Christian life. This leads us to consider—

II. The condition of things in the Corinthian church, as regards the Lord's supper, which called forth the warning words of the text.

The love-feasts, or agapæ, formed a very important feature of the outward fellowship of the church in apostolic times, and for many generations after. Their precise origin is obscure, but there can be little doubt, I think, that they were the children of that custom of the church in its first young infancy, which is chronicled in the closing verses of the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. And just as Christian morality finds something in the same key in the best utterances of the pagan schools; just as some of our Lord's most striking sayings and parables find their prototypes in the masterpieces of the doctors of the law; just as the fellowship and worship of the church find their originals in the synagogue institution, which was developed in Palestine after the return from the captivity, and became the chief nurse of the religious life of the people: so doubtless something like the Christian agapæ will be found by the curious scholar, both in the gentile and Jewish worlds.

The dinner or supper referred to by our Lord in Luke xiv. 12—“*When thou makest a dinner or supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just*”—was probably something of this order. It was the custom in the good old times for the richer Jews to make an entertainment on the sabbath days for their poorer brethren who came to the synagogue from far. But in process of time the poor were forgotten, and splendid banquets were spread by the rich Jews for their rich friends and guests. It would be a curious question, whether the habit which prevails among the wealthier Scotchmen, in the great towns especially, of giving grand dinners on the “sabbath,” is an abuse of a kindred custom. Certain it is at any rate, that in the history of our own persecuted sects in England and Scotland, such generous provision for the poor who came from far to “hear the word” and “enjoy the ordinances” was made by the wealthier members. William Brewster kept open house in this fashion in the old manor house of Scrooby, on the borders of Lincolnshire, where John Robinson ministered, and where modern Independency was born.

Out of some such reminiscence or necessity the agapé arose. The members brought their provisions and feasted temperately together. The rich charged them—

selves with the care of their poorer brethren, and suffered none to lack. In the Corinthian church things had rapidly fallen into disorder and decay. There were divisions among them, as we learn from the first chapter. Whether in the 18th verse the apostle refers to these divisions is doubtful. Probably not, but rather to their habit of eating separately in little knots of acquaintances and friends, as described in the 21st verse. But again, it is more than probable that these little private companies would be in some measure connected with the doctrinal sympathies and antagonisms which are rebuked so sharply in the earlier chapters of the epistle. At any rate there was selfish separation, strife, and gluttony. The rich ate together and drank together their choice food and wine, while the poor were left uncared for, and the homeless found no home at the banquets of the church.

In the course of the feast, perhaps at the close, the Lord's supper was celebrated. That involved eating and drinking in common. There must have been some pause, some words of address or prayer, to mark it off from the love-feast. But in the confusion and sensual good fellowship which the agapé had generated in the Corinthian church, that seriousness of mind, that sympathy of spirit with the meaning of the ordinance and of the event which it celebrated, which the due observance demanded, was utterly dissipated. The ordinance was observed grossly and carelessly, if observed at all; perhaps it was observed by some while others were eating and drinking to excess, or were hungrily watch-

ing the feasters and literally craving for food; and so the Christian church was turned into the similitude of a pagan temple, and the most sacred Christian rite differed in nothing but in name from an idolatrous feast. Then wrote St. Paul these stern and trenchant words, "*Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.*"

III. We are now in a position to measure the precise force of these words.

The first question concerns the word *unworthily*, which, though it is spurious in the 29th verse, is the ruling word in the whole passage, and must be distinctly understood before we can seize the full bearing of the apostle's idea. And really the matter is very simple. These words cause intense distress to sensitive and anxious consciences, to those who are filled with self distrust and self rebuke, and who dread lest they should bring shame on the Name which they desire to honour, by the weakness of their faith or the poverty of their love. Let such dismiss all anxiety as to the possible bearing of the word "*unworthily*" on their case. It bears precisely the opposite way. The unworthiness which the apostle denounces so sharply consisted in the utter absence of all anxiety upon the subject; a callousness which suffered a man to make a hearty meal with his boon companions, under pretence

of celebrating the Lord's supper. Any anxiety of spirit, any fear of being unworthy, which has humility and self distrust at the heart of it, would, I say unhesitatingly, be a sign of worthiness in the sense in which the terms worthy and unworthy are employed by St. Paul. The difficulty in Corinth was the utter absence of trouble about it; eating and drinking with no more discernment of the Lord's body, that is, of all that was meant by the Lord's supper, than if it had been a pagan festival. Hence those who in this sense ate and drank unworthily made themselves guilty, in the apostle's judgment, of the Lord's death; that is, they were precisely in the careless, undiscerning, or malignant state of mind which possessed those who killed the Prince of Life. Had they been in Jerusalem then, the cry, "Away with Him," would have issued from their lips. But the least gleam of spiritual anxiety separates its subjects by a whole heaven from those who are here described. The apostle would have welcomed it joyfully as a sign of animation, where all was otherwise dulness and death. Let no humble-hearted disciple nourish his self distrust to the point of abstinence, out of this passage; for him it means everything that is benignant. An over sensitive anxiety about unworthiness needs to be dealt with in a quite different way.

2. The second question concerns the word damnation. Of this we have simply to say that it is an utter and most unhappy mistranslation of the Greek. Judgment is what the word means, and its force in this

particular connection the remainder of the chapter expounds. God's chastisements were on the church at Corinth, His judgments. St. Paul indicates here their true reason and character, which the Corinthians had failed to appreciate. The man who abuses by gross carnal habits the supper of the Lord brings judgment on himself, which, if he would judge himself, examine himself, set his thoughts in order, and clearly discern what he is about, he might spare. There is something radically unchristian in connecting damnation with the abuse of an ordinance, however sacred. That question hangs on graver considerations than the most sacred rites; it depends entirely on the direct relation of the soul to Christ—the one vital matter, faith in Him. And again, the judgment, whatever it may mean, waits on a kind of abuse, the very opposite of that which is within reach of a tender and sensitive conscience. Such an one is simply abusing this passage, by suffering anything which it contains to keep him away from the table of the Lord.

3. The third question concerns ourselves, our difficulties and dangers in connection with the Lord's supper, which, though they cannot reproduce, may yet bear a certain likeness to, these sins of the Corinthian church.

We are not in circumstances which tempt us to the kind of unworthiness suggested in the text. But we surely may be in kindred peril, and need to judge ourselves, to examine ourselves, lest we too be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

i. We may, like the Corinthians, approach the Lord's table in a careless, irreverent, and even contemptuous mind. We may regard it as a formal act of Christian propriety, perhaps as a means of spiritual safety; as a man of profligate life once said to me, "I take the sacrament every Good Friday and Christmas day; I am all right." Any discernment, any appreciation of the Lord's body, is in that case hopeless; and the man who partakes in this spirit simply proclaims himself the comrade of those who slew the Lord. He who approaches the Lord's table without true penitence, sympathy, and love, is in the same peril as these Corinthian Christians, and exposes himself to the same sentence, the same judgment; as a despiser, not of the bread and the wine, but of all which they symbolise; all which on earth heals, purifies, and saves.

ii. A man may sin in connection with the Lord's supper by discerning, as he supposes, the Lord's body, and nothing more; discerning it in the gross carnal sense against which our Lord, in John vi. 63, lifts His voice in warning; seeing and tasting, as he supposes, the Lord's body, but having no true and real discernment of the Lord. Superstition is as blinding in one way as indifference is in another. To treat the elements as the Lord's body, and to suppose that it is as it were freshly offered as a sacrifice whenever the rite is celebrated, is to be blind to the great central truth of Christianity, "*the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once*"—who "*offered one sacrifice for sins for ever;*" "*by which one offering he hath perfected for ever them*



*which are sanctified."* It is to reproduce under Christianity the most carnal elements of the law, and to make a spiritual communion a magical ceremony, having inherent virtue of healing and saving; whereby the true faith, faith in the living person, the Lord Jesus Christ, is dishonoured, and all true appreciation of the meaning and virtue of the Lord's supper is utterly lost.

iii. We may eat and drink unworthily, by not discerning the Lord's love; by not feeling the full force of the invitation, "*Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*"

Many, we fear, realise in the communion of the church a sense of separation from the great multitude outside. It is to them a sign of privilege, a seal of election, something which distinguishes them from and which sets them above the world. Christ, in the dark sad hour in which He instituted the rite, rejoiced in spirit, as He foresaw the range of the attractive power of His gospel. "*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*" There is no true communion of the saints which does not kindle yearning and compassionate love to the sinners, which does not draw the soul to the fellowship of the Redeemer's spirit, who kept company with publicans and harlots that He might bless them, and whose one great work on earth was to seek and to save the lost.

## XI.

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF WORLDLY SUCCESS.\*

"But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for He it is that giveth thee the power to get wealth."—DEUT. viii. 18.

Few things are more popularly misunderstood in the church than the conditions of success in life. One of the most startling things in human experience is, and ever has been, the extent to which men who pay no homage to God, and apparently own no allegiance to His laws, succeed in life. It has puzzled the wisest thinkers from the first ages until now, and has been to multitudes, and these not the least thoughtful and earnest of men, a sore difficulty in the way of a calm and cloudless faith in God. Let the sinners suffer, let the saints be happy, let the godless lose, let the godly win the prizes of life, is the simple arrangement which would save our minds a world of perplexity, and our spirits sore doubts and dreads. But the world is arranged upon a quite different plan. It is no part of God's method to save our understandings perplexity and our spirits conflict. The path of His

\* This is hardly an exposition of a misread passage of Scripture, strictly speaking; it is rather a misunderstood subject, on which much popular error prevails. The writer ventures to hope that the view here presented may be in some measure helpful to those who are perplexed by the difficulties which surround it, and who desire honestly to think it out for themselves.

purposes is thick strewn with stumbling-blocks, and human life is full of contradictions. There is no theory which can be framed by man which it will fit symmetrically. No justification of the ways of God to man, and every great thinker has attempted one, makes plain His counsels and squares them perfectly with human judgments. "His ways are not as our ways, neither are His thoughts as our thoughts. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts." Higher, be it noted; not contradicting our deepest convictions, but ranging in a sphere into which we cannot always follow them and trace the working of what we know to be His righteous laws. The perplexities and contradictions of life remind us of this continually. It will need a long life of education, and the clear sunlight of eternity, to see God's thoughts face to face, and to know them even as also we are known. And then, I think, the hymn will ring out most clearly from lips most familiar with questions here: "*Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are all thy ways, O thou King of saints!*"

We lay down the law very peremptorily and most justly, that the godly man, "*the man who feareth God and worketh righteousness,*" alone can win the great prizes of life. "*Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come.*" But we should like to be able to point the moral by showing that every ungodly man

inevitably becomes a bankrupt, while every pious man is prosperous and happy. Yet the lesson of life is widely different. There have been men, able, earnest men, keen observers and profound thinkers, to whom the observation of life seemed to establish precisely the opposite conclusion. "*Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power! Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore, they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.*" (Job xxi. 7-15.) And again: "*I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death, and their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. . . . Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart can wish. . . . And they say, How doth God know, and is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.*" (Ps. lxxiii. 3-12.) Now it is by no means easy, on the ground of mere observation, to overthrow these views. God does not make it easy for us to understand Him. "*His commandment is ex-*

*ceeding broad."* The universe is very large, eternity is very long, and within narrower limits He cannot undertake to make the whole of His methods plain. "*Clouds and darkness are round about him,*" will ever be the cry of man's understanding; "*Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne,*" will ever be the confession of man's faith. The rain and the sunlight still fall on the saints and on the sinners. Strenuous industry, whether the fear of God inspire it or no, and a strong brain, still conduct men on the whole to the chief prizes of life. Moral elements seem at first sight to be strangely eliminated from the conditions of the conflict; and, however men may moralize or theologize about it, the race is to the swift, the spoil is to the strong, and God is on the side of the great battalions in most of the decisive conflicts of the world.

Why should I remember the Lord my God? the busy successful man may fairly ask himself: I have had no particular piety hitherto, but here I am at the very pinnacle of fortune. As far as I can see, mine own hand hath gotten me the prize; why should I bow down and confess that it is from the hand of God?

I confess freely that I cannot tell, if it is to be tried by the test of mere worldly success. I think that preachers do much harm by accepting that test, and trying to make it appear that the good things of this world on the whole are the prize of the men who remember the Lord their God. Life refuses to be

tortured to any such conclusions. We are simply involving men in a mist of perplexity, which may easily deepen into the night of unbelief, if we allow them to think that the question can be settled on any such grounds. If man is to live for ends which he shares with the beasts that perish, I am not sure that the higher endowments are not rather in his way. Indeed, I am quite sure that they are in his way. God only explains this life to the man who believes in immortality. The true projection of life is on the horizon of eternity. Let the veils of sense fall all round, and there is absolutely no explanation of the mystery; lift them, let the lines of life be seen as they run on and traverse the field of heaven, and the problem, if not solved, begins to reveal the secret of the solution. We can wait until the sunlight of eternity flashes on it, to know to the very depths the mystery of God.

I. There appears to me to be a great fallacy in the way in which this subject is constantly treated from a religious point of view.

I deny utterly that any man can win any sort of worldly success in defiance of the laws and counsels of God. I say as absolutely to the most blasphemous atheist as to the most pious Christian, "*The Lord your God giveth you the power to get wealth.*" Not a piece of gold has come to you but in obedience to His laws. And I do not mean simply that this marvellous vital power which lies at the root of all being, doing, and having, is God's free gift to us; is the breath of

His inspiration, renewed each moment, ay in the very instant when the hand may be lifted to defy Him, or the voice to blaspheme His name. That surely is an awful thought. The Being whom we defy giving us the breath and the force to defy Him, arming us with the weapons which we may use against Him with deadly malignity, flooding our path the while with His sunlight, and crowning us with His lovingkindness and tender mercy. Could His eye or His hand flash out, as once on the palace wall, in the act of blessing, while man is in the act of cursing, methinks he would shudder with horror, and cry out for mercy, and for a new heart, a heart to love and to serve this merciful and benignant Lord.

I do not mean only then that God sustains your soul in life, and therefore gives you power to get wealth ; I mean definitely that if you want money, want position, want influence, want success of any sort, you can only have it on the condition of absolute obedience to the counsel and commandment of the Lord. You may disobey Him in a thousand ways not connected with the matter in hand, but in that you *must* obey Him with prompt, absolute submission ; or the success is beyond your reach, you are as powerless to win it as to unsphere a star. Sit idle all day waiting for business, fold your hands and cry out to heaven for prosperity, and every fool can tell you that you may sit there waiting for ever. Work, work, work, God demands of you ; refuse to render it, and your dream of fortune remains a dream. The world has no blessing

for its idlers, because God made the world, and laid this stern law upon man from the first, "*In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread.*" If you can make idling successful, if you can make poor, puny, half-hearted efforts the winners, then I grant you you may well say, "Who is the Lord that we should fear Him?" But you know perfectly the conditions under which the prize which you strive for must be won—stern, close, uncompromising toil. If you are to be anything, or to *win* anything, on which you have set your heart, you must work for it, you must deny yourself for it, you must suffer for it. Under these conditions alone as a rule can it be gained.

Who are the real slaves of toil, the men who allow themselves no rest, no breathing time, no relaxation of the strain; who are to be found day after day, early and late, at their weary posts; who know no home joys, no vision of the beauty of nature, and the beautiful thoughts and works of men? Who but the men who will to be rich, who make that their end, and measure solely by that standard their success in life? There are the conditions; God exacts it of them. If they *will* have wealth, they shall work for it, slave for it; and till you can repeal that law, and break the spring of that necessity, do not talk, I pray you, of defying God. "*And if a man also strive for masteries yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.*" Try a short cut to your success. Lie and cheat, cook accounts, salt invoices, clip quantity, adulterate quality; and see if in the long run you can make it succeed;



see if men will trust you, will delight to do business with you, will seek opportunities of serving you. If they will, if you grow in honour, trust, and love, as the cheating and lying goes on, then settle it by all means that you can dispense with God. No; you know well that it will not succeed, that not on these conditions can a man win any success in which a knave or a fool would not be his fittest comrade. God besets your path, your going out, your coming in; behind and before He besets your way. Not a step, not a work, but in submission to His laws. He gives you power to get wealth. He is the Author of the laws which rule the getting; He *will* have your homage to them; hand, brain, heart must obey Him, while the idle lips deny Him; and if you have been faithful *so far* to His constitution of things, it is His hand which holds out to you the prize. "*Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for he it is that giveth thee power to get wealth.*" See how in the pursuit of dear gold even you are compelled to submit to Him; how only by submission to Him can you win any shadow of success; and learn how good it is to submit to Him in the higher things concerning which His laws are as clear and stringent, the happy issues of which depend absolutely on submission, in which to fight against God is to hate your own soul, and to love the gates of death.

II. But the question still recurs—what profit shall we have if we serve Him? What good will religion do to us in our pursuit of success?

It seems, a worldly man may say, that the godly man, if he works hard and faithfully, gets on; the ungodly man, if he works hard and faithfully, gets on. Where is the difference? If a man lives for this world, and makes it his home, caring chiefly about its prizes, why should he trouble himself about the Lord? why should he make an effort to remember Him? Is not the book of Ecclesiastes right? "*All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath*" (Eccles. ix. 2). What difference is there between him that sacrificeth and him that sacrificeth not?

The difference is not in the amount of success which may be won. God does not grant a full tide of worldly prosperity to His servants, and a half tide only to the industrious men of this world who pay no honour to His name. The difference lies in quite another region. It is the difference between a serf and a freeman, between sunlight and darkness, between gladness and weariness, between a blessed man and a cursed man, between a man above whom heaven is shining and one beneath whom hell is yawning, who knows that his life is going down into the pit. Understand how it is. If your whole being could be fully satisfied with the wealth which industry brings, then industry would be the one thing which God would have the right to ask of you, as He asks it of the ants

and the bees, and no claim could be urged upon you for anything beyond. But God has a thousand points at which His plans and purposes touch you ; that is, in which He has so constituted you that only in obeying His will can you find rest and live. You may obey His law of industry admirably, and prosper in wealth ; but you may break the while His laws of truth, purity, righteousness, charity, and go a withered, shattered cripple through life, and remain a moaning, hopeless cripple through eternity. Just as God gives you power to get wealth by earnest, persevering toil, He gives you power by the exercise of other and yet higher faculties to get peace and joy, heavenly fellowship and heavenly hope. And just as a man who refuses the law of labour, who idles and dawdles through life, but half lives, knows none of life's joys, wears none of life's crowns, so the man who refuses the law of spiritual labour—that effort, that self-denial, that faith, that patience, which man was made to put forth and to exercise continually—is dead while he liveth. The joys of the true man's life he cannot taste ; its crowns he cannot wear ; the holy fellowships of spiritual being he cannot enter ; God stamps him reprobate, below proof, worthless for all the higher work which a man was made for ; angels and living men cast him out from their company ; “the outer darkness” is his home ; “weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth” is his portion eternally.

Is there any life lived in the universe so dreary, so deadly, as that of the mere millionaire ? There are no

such human apes, such dried up mummies of men, as are to be found in your great banking houses and palaces of commerce. The poorest beggar, probably, has more real joy of life than many an one whom you could name, and of whom the current description is, "he is rolling in gold." There is a vast wealth of godlike faculty there, "fusting" in him unused. And power unused, faculty held back from its God-appointed sphere, soon gets acrid and mordant, and gnaws and wears within. Thus God will have it, for it is thus that He keeps His hold on men and things, and compels some consideration of His counsels and His ways. A flower made for the sunlight and planted in the shade twists and writhes with a restless longing for its congenial atmosphere and conditions; it catches every eye, and seems to proffer a mute petition for pity and aid. So the soul stretches by native instinct to truth, goodness, and God. But sin has perverted and corrupted its instincts. An evil will holds them back from their true career; and then God, grappling with this evil will that He may master and rule it, ordains that they shall become tormentors, and shall harry the soul that will not satisfy their native longings, but will rather take these coursers of the sun and yoke them to the basest and most profitless work. "*Wherefore spend ye your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*"

Thus much about the nature of the profit which we are to look for, the ends we are to keep in view in aiming at success in life. Now let us consider—

III. The direct answer to the question, why should you remember the Lord your God ?

1. Because it will bring you at once out into the glad sunlight, will fill you with the glow of health and animation, will make even your toil lightsome, and will increase immeasurably the value of your store. You were not made to be grubbing underground all your days like the moles, busy only with the dirt of this world. You were made to live in heaven's broad sunlight, to tread the earth with a royal boldness, to look round upon nature, up into heaven, on into eternity, and say—humbly for it is a gift, but joyfully for it is a sure one—all this is mine. All the joy of a man whose life is bright and strong within him, flooding every pulse, vein, and organ, making the bare sense of existence a sensation of bliss, comes only to those who remember the Lord their God ; who can look out everywhere and meet nothing but His fatherly smile and the touch of His fatherly hand. You will live in the world just as the heir of a great kingdom lives in his father's realm ; with a free sense of his right to call all its pleasures and treasures his own, not to squander, for there is a higher lord above him, but most richly to enjoy. A man who is ever poring over one theme not only gets weary, but loses his power, slowly but surely, to grapple with it. Man is a being of various manifold endowments, and each power for its full development

needs the thorough activity of the rest. If one only is used, that one gets languid and weary, life becomes a dreary monotone, from which it is a glad change, just because it is a change, to the valley of the shadow of death. The monotony of our modern life, of which our moralists complain, is due very much to the entire absorption in one pursuit which we allow, and indeed rather admire and honour, prostituting Paul's "one thing I do" to the vilest use. It is just slaves' toil which a man carries on, who cares for nothing but the good of this world. I have heard of men who have cared for nothing, thought of nothing, but buying and selling and getting gain, who have gone out of great houses of business in their old age with an enormous fortune, and who in a few months have crept back and prayed to be taken in again, that they might at least be delivered from the dreariness of their own company, and from the misery, in such a world as this, of having nothing to do. I believe that it is the richest men, whom the dread of dying in a workhouse haunts most constantly; money, which they have made their idol, at last becomes their tyrant, and takes bitter revenge on its slave.

2. Remember the Lord your God, and it will spare you all wearing and crushing anxieties; you will work freely, cheerily, because it will not be to you a matter of life or of death. A sure portion is laid up for you beyond the touch of accident or vicissitude; moth or rust cannot corrupt that treasure; thieves cannot break through to destroy. Men aim at some beggarly

imitation of this, by settling something out of the reach of the vicissitudes and catastrophes of business; a sure support against a rainy day they call it, while they are doing their very best to make all days rainy, dull, dreary, weary, laden to breaking strain with care and pain. *"Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil (or all evils); which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."* Remember the Lord your God, who holds the treasures of the universe in His hand, and who has said, *"I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee"*; and then smile at the contingencies of the future. It cannot beggar you. It cannot touch your true treasure; it can but make it richer, dearer, as you measure it more fully, and realize that it is yours for eternity. You will enjoy what you have as those only can enjoy who are fearless, who are full of heart and full of hope; rich now, and rich for ever; able to take full joy in the present, because they have inevitably, while they remember the Lord their God, a richer future in store.

3. It will save you the shame and the anguish of finding yourself bankrupt at last and for ever. Here it may be possible in a measure to occupy yourself

with one thing mainly, and to shut out all the rest. The days come when it will be impossible. "*There was a certain rich man, whose ground brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do? because I have no room where to bestow my fruits and my goods. And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up in store for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be that thou hast provided? So is every one that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*" It is a simple history, but alas! a very general one. This night, to-morrow night, some night, the message will come, and how many will it find prepared, rich in good works, having a good store against the time to come, with a firm hold on eternal life? There are uses of money which will turn into treasure, when gold goes down with all corruptible things into the final fire. "*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me. Then shall the righteous answer him saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee, or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw*



*we thee a stranger, and took thee in ; naked, and clothed thee ? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee ? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."*

No bankruptcy in time or in eternity for him who has the blessing of the poor, and of him who is ready to perish, on his store ! But picture the horror of the man on whom, as he lies groaning and tossing in his last sickness, the flesh shuddering in the agony of dissolution, the heart growing faint with that cold deadly faintness which is the harbinger of death, the consciousness dawns slowly that his life has been a horrible, an irreparable mistake. "A hundred thousand pounds, doctor, for another month of life," cried a poor, dying Dives. Fool ! a hundred million would have had as little charm to the pitiless ear of death. Bankrupt ! having fought a hard fight, having robbed life of all its joy and death of all its hope, to make bankruptcy and beggary impossible, but bankrupt at last, and bankrupt for ever ! "*Wherefore I charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy. That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate ; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."*

## XII.

### THE OVERTHROW OF DEATH.

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."—JOHN xi. 25, 26.

WE err in the interpretation of this passage mainly through fearfulness and poverty of hope. We are afraid lest we should put upon it too strong a pressure; we tremble lest we should overstrain the meaning of these wonderful words. *We* too, like Martha, talk and think of a resurrection at the last day. Jesus speaks also and as absolutely of a present resurrection. *We* talk and think of escaping the pains of the death which is eternal, through faith in Him who "*hath destroyed him that had the power of death,*" and hath wrought deliverance for his captives. Jesus speaks of our deliverance from the pains of this death which is always threatening us, which is always working within and around us, rending heart-strings, rifling homes, breaking up the dearest fellowships, and making life to many a sad heart one long wail of pain and fear. Both deaths Jesus has destroyed, having wrought for us a double deliverance; because here and now He is, in us, "the Resurrection and the Life;" and "whoso liveth and believeth in Him cannot die."

We none of us lay hold with full firm grasp on the

Christian doctrine about death. Death is destroyed with its author, for him who believes in Christ. We read the texts, "*who hath abolished death,*" and again, "*that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil*"; but we unconsciously attach a partial and modified meaning to the words. Paul speaks strongly, we say, like a man of vivid imagination. He sees that one day in the splendours of the new creation, in the joys and glories of the eternal state, death will be swallowed up in victory, so he speaks of it as already abolished. But alas! a great sea of agony, lurid, foaming, with broad stains of blood, lies between humanity and that consummation. Death abolished, destroyed! Ah! do not mock me with such words while I stand by that new-made grave. I have seen a dear child, tender, gentle, full of loving tones and touches, which clung round my very heartstrings, struggling, gasping, choking, in his ruthless grasp. I have seen a goodly youth, the pride of his kindred, his mother's hope and joy, full of splendid capacity and vitality, struck down in his prime by the merciless hand, and what was yesterday the promise of a beautiful and noble manhood to-day is a mass of festering corruption which I must bury out of my sight. While my eyes are full of tears, and my heart is wrung with anguish, mock me not with words about the overthrow of death.

Alas! what is there that death does not overthrow? What beauty is there which he does not desecrate? What strength is there which he does not humble?

What love is there which he is not sure to make one day the source of the keenest pain which a human heart can endure? No. "*Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died,*" is rather the cry of my spirit as it misses its loved one. Thou mightest have spared me this anguish, and let my arms still clasp him. And now I know that whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, He will give it Thee. Now Thou canst give him back again. Let me search once more the depths of those beloved eyes, let me feel once more the touch of the vanished hand, and hear once more the music of the voice that is still, and then I can believe and rejoice in the Deliverer. But while that grave remains sealed, and I can only rain tears upon its sods, mock me not by telling me of the destruction of death. I believe and hope that one day there will be no more tears, no more pain, no more death. In this sense I believe in Him who is the Resurrection and the Life; but here and now death seems to be master in the house of life.

This is our natural interpretation of the Christian promises and assurances. "*Thy brother shall rise again,*" said Jesus as His first, His most substantial, His most complete word of comfort. All else is but auxiliary to that, whatever it may mean. Martha seems to have accepted the assurance but sadly; to her it seemed a far off consolation. "*I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*" But here and now I want him; my heart strains now to meet him. I know that whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God He will give it Thee. Give me to clasp my brother

back through death. And Jesus answered her, He answers us, He answers all sad mourning hearts, expounding what the resurrection means: "*I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth on me, though he were dead yet shall he live, and he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?*"

These words are constantly understood as though they simply asserted a power—a power to raise again. As though they meant, the power is in Me which will accomplish at last the resurrection of humanity; and therefore the raising again of that man, if it seem good to Me, is easily within its range. He that shall raise up humanity can raise this man to life again, and can deliver all in whom His life abides from the true death, the death eternal. But this interpretation surely falls very far short of the real meaning of these words of Christ. They seem studiously employed to express something which, after all, is inexpressible, by words, to the understanding which discerns the outward phenomena of death all round,—the entire absolute abolition of death by Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, through whom the dead live, through whom the living cannot die. If the death here meant and spoken of be the death of everlasting perdition, I think that we should detect a certain ring of untruth in the words. They seem to speak of life and death in the common sense in which the words are understood by mortals. It was a very real, substantial, physical death, which that gravestone sealed from sight, and

which was tormenting the hearts of the two sisters so profoundly that it drew tears from the sympathetic Saviour; so deep was the grief, so real, so sad. If there were any double meaning in the word death as our Lord employed it, it must have grievously mocked the hearts of those mourners. It was over this death which was before their senses that their hearts were breaking; it was about this death that their Saviour seemed to them to be speaking. Surely there must be some deep meaning concerning this death which they had been watching, this tomb by which they were weeping, in these solemn, pregnant, awful words—perhaps the most awful that were ever spoken by human lips: “*I am the resurrection and the life. He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*”

And yet what can they mean? Alas! the death is too palpable. The pains, the groans, the dying strife, we have seen, and the anguish of them is still fresh in our hearts. The vacant place is still too visibly vacant. There is a darkness where so lately there was the light of a living presence; a form is gone from the midst of us which made so much of the joy of life for us, and which can be with us, as he *was* with us, no more for ever. What can be the meaning of these deep mysterious words, the dead shall live, the living shall never die? Where is this overthrow of death?

The Lord's answer means surely thus much. Here, in the man whom I loved, who in your sense of the word is dead, and who has seen corruption, you would see at this moment, could you see all, that death is

abolished. And that you may see as well as believe part of the all, and that other broken-hearted ones through all the ages of man's history may be helped by sight to believe with you, behold I bring him back living into your midst. "Lazarus, come forth!" and he that was dead arose.

But we must not suffer ourselves to imagine that this was the rising again of which our Lord spoke to Martha when she first met Him, and which was, in His judgment, the absolute and complete consolation. What He said to Martha He says to us. The consolation which He meant to convey was for man, and within reach of all men. God's chief comfort to a human soul is never an arbitrary and exceptional interposition. The true springs of consolation He has opened where all can drink of them, in the heart of the common woes, the common sicknesses, the common griefs of mankind. The special act by which He illustrated and enforced His doctrine may be regarded as a special act of consolation vouchsafed to the household whom He loved. But His real benediction to them was the promise of resurrection; not the standing up of Lazarus again in this life, again to toil, to suffer, and to die, but his standing up in life in the world of the resurrection, beyond shame, pain, parting, sickness, death, for ever. This was the real comfort to Martha from the lips of Christ, could she but have understood it; and this is our comfort, which none can pluck out of our hands.

The raising again of Lazarus may or may not

have been a boon to that particular household. We know nothing of his history, or the history of the family of Bethany, further. But understand that the raising again of *your* lost ones in this life would not be a boon; you would gain nothing and lose much in the end if they were restored once more to your embrace, and death were conquered for you simply within the little limits of this little world. Death then, the natural death, remains. The doctrine of Christ announces nothing, promises nothing, about the restoration of the dead in this life. The restoration of Lazarus to life and to his home is quite out of the track of the Saviour's work for you and me and mankind. Not thus will He have *us* watch for the glory of God. It is His purpose to leave death to work with all his dark apparatus of terror, to leave the flesh a prey to sickness and decay. He mitigates none of it; He abolishes none of it. So far as we can see, the pain of death has been but aggravated by that civilisation which Christianity has brought in its train. Physically it is not less real, less terrible, to die now than it was eighteen centuries ago. Possibly it may be even more so, and yet He tells us that death is destroyed; that whoso liveth and believeth in Him shall never die. To the understanding the words seem a mocking paradox. To those who can rise to the contemplation of the things not seen and eternal, who can see light in His light, it is a profound and blessed truth that—

“Death is the only thing in death that dies.”



The Lord means us to understand that through Him, for those who believe, death has lost all the elements which make it death. It is distinctly and absolutely a process of life; it is a being born into a world of congenial conditions and surroundings; it is a birth pang, not a last agony; it is a process of construction and not of dissolution; and, did we understand it all, did we see it as Christ sees it, we should remember no more the anguish for joy that a man is born into the higher, the eternal, the homelike world.

What is the pagan, that is, the natural human conception of death? What does man mean by it? If we can understand that, we shall know what the Saviour means when, speaking of men and to men, He tells us that He has abolished death.

The real dread of death in the natural heart does not rise out of its pain, nor even from the ghastly gloom which surrounds it. It is the sense of an end, a limit, a dark sad bounding line to all the most dear and familiar experiences of life, which creates its terror. Death is privative; it robs us of so much, it breaks up so much, which the natural heart dares not dream of as restored in that vast, unknown, awful world of shades. All the pagan vision of the world of the dead is negative. It is the world of the living robbed of all that makes its life; just as the ghost of a man is supposed to be the form of the man robbed of all that makes him a living tangible presence in the daylight human world. It is the wending forth of the soul from this light-filled, warm, and homelike world, into the cold darkness,

which makes men shudder ; it is the final rupture of all the bonds which bind them so sweetly, and which make life a chain of holy and beautiful offices and ministries to the nobler and purer spirits, and of familiar interests and delights to the rest.

“ *Linquenda tellus, et domus, et placens  
Uxor; neque harum, quas colis, arborum,  
Te, præter invisas cupressus,  
Ulla brevem dominum sequetur.*”

To see no more the glad sunlight in the shining air, to hear no more the song of birds, to delight no more in the splendour and fragrance of flowers, to watch the glorious beauty of the creation fade on the dying sight, as the sunset glow pales in the west and the pall of night settles over all, and to pass out into a world of dark and dreary shadows,—a world which no sunlight quickens, no glow of life inspires ! To cast a last glance round the dear home circle, to look the last look into the eyes which have been to us, through all the stress and strain of life’s battle, fountains of inspiration and hope ! To touch for the last time the lips of the little ones crying and sobbing around the parting soul ; to grasp for the last time the hand of dear and long tried comrades, whose daily fellowship has lent its chief interest and joy to life ! To let the gaze wander feebly and lingeringly over the familiar scenes of the home or the business, the accustomed stool at the desk or seat by the hearth, and bid them a last, an eternal farewell ! There and thus we have lived ; we have had no notion of life but this ; and here

we can live no longer, while the future is a dark unknown world, of which we know but this, that the place which knows us now will know us no more for ever ; that plead, strive, agonize as we may, never, never can we revisit the familiar scenes, gaze into the familiar faces, and refresh our hearts with a vision of the vanished life ! It is this, the break, the bound, the end, sharply rounding all the experiences which we have connected with living, which makes the dying so terrible, which drapes the unseen world into which the passing soul goes forth in the dreariest darkness, while the world from which the inexorable sentence expels it seems radiant with sunlight, bathed with floods of life and joy.

And the pagan idea lives on and infects us still. There is a remarkable passage in the Old Testament which reveals how profoundly it had infected a saintly man under the old dispensation. "*I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave : I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living : I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world. Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent : I have cut off like a weaver my life ; he will cut me off with pining sickness ; from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me.*" (Isa. xxxviii. 10-19.)

The same mood tinges and taints us under the new dispensation. Martha, as we have seen, found something almost saddening instead of inspiring in the

thought of the resurrection. "*I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*" But that is a far off hope—too far to help me now, to soothe my aching heart, or to repair the breach which death has made in the circle of my beloved; the loss is here and now, the compensation is far away.

There can be no doubt that much of our Christian thinking about the dead is in this key. The thought of the last day, the far off bound to the great human experiment of freedom, when the results will be summed up and the harvest of life will be gathered in, seems to remove to an almost infinite distance the perfect bliss of our loved ones, and ours with them, which can only grow out of the fellowship of a complete and fruitful life. No doubt we guard ourselves from the extremes of foolish and unchristian doctrine, by dwelling much in words on the perfect blessedness of those who sleep in Jesus until the resurrection day. Still there is the lack of vital glow about the life which we conceive of them as living; we think of it as a separate provisional state, waiting full embodiment—that means waiting perfect life. They seem to be cut off from the activities of the world of spirit, their attitude is still expectant, they wait and hope, "*God having prepared some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*" We have all of us some haunting visions of the separate state and the condition of a disembodied spirit, which to an extent that we little realize prolong in Christendom the pagan dread and pain of death.

*"Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon,"* says Saint Paul. It is the characteristic desire and aspiration of the human. It is disembodiment at which the soul shudders; and we prolong the pagan shudder when death is in question, by postponing our conception of the complete embodiment of the emancipated spirit till a far off final resurrection day. Partial or feeble embodiment is partial or feeble life to the apprehension of our spirits, and however we may try to correct it by persuading ourselves of the perfect blessedness of the dead in Christ, the feeling that their life must be in a measure imperfect, till some far future day, unconsciously saddens us, and we sigh with Martha, as we set the stone on the tomb which buries all that this earth holds of the beloved presence, *"I know that he shall rise again, in the resurrection, at the last day."*

And now what is the doctrine of Christ? In answer to Martha's half sad sentence about the far off resurrection, the Lord declares, *"I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE."* Surely the fundamental idea here is a present resurrection; *"whoso liveth and believeth in me shall never die."* It seems to me that we miss the whole force of the words if we carry on our thoughts to the far future; and equally if we suppose that their immediate bearing was on the exceptional and partial quickening which was already thrilling through the dead man's veins as the Lord drew near. Resurrection means standing up again in life. Surely it is present overthrow and destruction of death, and

present resurrection, which our Lord proclaims in these sublime and awful words. Present overthrow and destruction of death. That is, Christ reveals it as a process of life; *in* the harmony and not *out of* the harmony of the Divine order: not a terrible accident introduced by an evil will into the sphere of the human, which has with difficulty been repaired; but a benign and blessed operation of the higher nature, whereby the spiritual thing which has been quickened in the womb of the natural is born into the atmosphere of the spiritual and eternal world.

*"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."* Man, in Christ, is a new creature, whose native air, the sphere of whose full expansion, activity, and joy are not here but in the spiritual world. Here the seed of a new nature is buried in the dark earth, as it were; in death it but bursts into the sunlight, that it may bud and bloom and fruit. It is no end of a career: it is birth, beginning; being born into the air and the sunlight in which the newborn in Christ shall live on for ever. If we can fully grasp the thought that death is a birth, which the joy bells of heaven are hailing, while our passing bells do their best to drown their music, we shall understand how death is abolished. All that made its terror, all that made men shudder at its aspect, all that made it death, is destroyed. It is a benign and beautiful evolution of life; benign and beautiful as are all evolutions of life, to be watched by all whose eyes

are "open," with profound joy, and to be hailed with triumphant songs. This is the victory over death—to make the death pangs birth pangs, and to drown the sobs of the mourners in the songs that hail the birth of the twice born spirit into the sphere of its perfect and eternal joy.

And these words of our Lord to Martha further assure us, that the soul which lives in Him passes at once by death into the sphere of a complete, a vivid, a fruitful human experience; it is just life in Christ, the life which it had been living here, with all its interests, activities, joys and hopes, lifted, translated to a higher sphere. There is no break of continuity. He who liveth in Christ can never die. The continuity of his life cannot be suspended; it is already in its deepest experiences and aspirations a part of the life of the celestial and eternal world. It cannot die. All that makes the man is immortal, and all that truly constitutes his life. All that belongs to his life in Christ he bears with him, and lives it out where he is at this moment, a risen man, in a spiritual body, in the homes, and they are not far off, of the spiritual world.

A risen man, I say. "*Not unclothed, but clothed upon.*" There is a day spoken of as in the far future, when the great experiment of the life of this world will be ended—and the world cannot be eternal—when the souls and the world which sin had deflowered shall put on the brightness of the final glory. What transformations may be before us in the far future we

know not; more wondrous surely, more glorious, than any of us dare even dream. But there is a real, a blessed transformation before us in the act of dying; unclothed of this mortal flesh, with its weakness and pain, we are clothed upon with our house which is from heaven. They are there, the dear ones who have gone on before, in their beautiful radiant forms, already glorious, already blessed. Perhaps even now they are the ministering spirits who tend us, who help our endeavours, who kindle our aspirations and contend with us against our foes. But wherever they may be, one thing our Lord will have us believe, and His own resurrection is the great witness of it, the proof of it to all mankind, that the dead in Christ stand up in perfect and glorious human form, and live on that life which they bore, unstained by a breath of decay, through death to heaven. If there is one thing which the risen life of our Lord on earth commands, compels us to believe, it is this—the continuity of our human life in all its richer joys and interests, through death, and, while it maintains its fellowship with its human kindred which it left behind still struggling in this world of sorrow, its full voiced, full pulsed activity in the human sphere, which has become the ruling sphere in the celestial world.

And if humanity lives on in its full orb of perfectness, —and the risen life of Christ on earth means that it does live on—homes live on, and loves. There are tender nurslings there, and motherly hearts to tend them; children's voices are not unheard in the chorus that



swells the anthem, "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain,*" before the central throne.

And here is the Lord's victory over death, and yours. Death pangs, birth pains. The groaning and rending of the earthly tabernacle, the struggling of a glorious heaven-born spirit for emancipation, that it may breathe the air of its native realm, and sun itself in the splendour that streams around the throne of God. The last choking gasp of the mortal, the first faint cry of the immortal life. The wearing out of the stained and wasted flesh but the laying down of the battered armour, that the veteran conqueror may pass up, white robed and with waving palms, to receive from the Captain his everlasting crown. Faith, as the film of death thickens, brightening into open vision; hope into the passionate joy of possession; and love into the flame of an immortal life, to be fed for ever from the life of God. Said not the Master truly, Christian, this is not to die?

"The world recedes, it disappears,  
Heaven opens on mine eyes, mine ears  
With sounds seraphic ring.  
Lend, lend, your wings; I mount, I fly:  
O grave, where is thy victory?  
O death, where is thy sting?"

"I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE; HE THAT BELIEVETH IN ME, THOUGH HE WERE DEAD, YET SHALL HE LIVE: AND WHOSOEVER LIVETH AND BELIEVETH IN ME SHALL NEVER DIE."

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